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A DEED WITHOUT A NAME

BY MRS. SOUTHWORTH

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A Deed Without a Name

A NOVEL

BY

MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH

AUTHOR OF

"Dorothy Harcourt's Secret," "To His Fate," "The Lost Heir," "A Noble Lord," "Sweet Love's Atonement," Etc.

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A DEED WITHOUT A NAME

CHAPTER I

THE ACCUSATION

"Thou art the man!" the speaker said, and paused.

The one spoken to started, flushed, paled and stared with a look of amazement that deepened into one of fixed horror.

The first was a man of about twenty-five years of age, of medium height, slender and elegant form, regular and rather feminine features, fair complexion, yellow hair and mustache and blue eyes. He wore a suit of light gray tweed, snow-white linen, fresh kid gloves and shining gaiters; no jewelry, except a slender gold watch chain.

His name was William Hanson. He was a gentleman of fortune and of "elegant leisure," "taking his ease at his inn," which in this instance was not a very exclusive and therefore not very fashionable Southern summer resort.

The second was a youth scarcely twenty-one years of age, of middle height and well-proportioned frame, but very thin, even to emaciation. His features, without being regular, were handsome, picturesque and striking. His complexion was very dark, his hair and mustache jet black and closely curled. His eyes were large, dark and somber, shadowed by thick, black lashes, and overhung by heavy, black brows. He wore a suit of rusty black cloth, well brushed and scrupulously clean and neat. In his shabby suit he still

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looked a patrician of the purest strain; nor did that something gloomy, despairing and tragic in his aspect detract from his appearance.

His name was William Harcourt. He was a descendant of the old settlers of St. Mary's, and of the old cavaliers of England who had risked all and lost all in their loyalty to the royal house of Stuart.

All of their truth, courage and devotion and—ah, me!—much of their pride, rashness and recklessness, had come down to this, their remote son.

He was an undergraduate at a Southern university, and—now in his vacation time—he was clerk at the Crest House at the Isle of Storms, off the coast of Maryland.

The memorable interview with which this chapter opens took place in the office of the hotel, in the "still, small" hours between midnight and dawn.

The two men were alone in the apartment—the only living creatures up in the house, except the night watchman at the other end of the hall, and even he was dozing in his chair.

Young Harcourt would also have been abed and asleep, but that something emanating from his aspect like a mist, overshadowing his presence like a cloud, "murdered sleep," and so he sat in the office trying to drown memory in work—in exacting and absorbing daybook and ledger work.

William Hanson might have been in his room and in dreams, but that a great desire kept him up, a great hope sent him to seek this private interview with the clerk of the Crest House.

And so, when the house was supposed to be buried in sleep, he stole to the office and startled the solitary worker with the words quoted.

The youth kept his dark, troubled eyes fixed upon the face of the speaker, with a stare of stupefied horror that soon grew into a glare of terror and despair.

"Yes, I repeat, Harcourt: 'Thou art the man!'" reiterated the accuser, letting his hand fall with some force on the shoulder of the accused.

The youth shrank under the touch as his breath

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came and went in deep inspirations, his flexible nostrils extended and contracted, and his sensitive lips quivered under his dark mustache. But his great, gloomy eyes never moved from their fixed glare, nor did his cheeks change from their ashen, deathlike pallor.

"Now, then! Why don't you speak? What have you to say?" demanded Hanson, fixing his light blue eyes significantly on the blanched face of his companion.

"I—do not—understand," faltered the latter.

"Oh, yes, you do! I see that you understand perfectly that I am talking about the suppressed act in this week's drama, the deed done in No. 25, at two o'clock last Thursday," said Hanson, pointing his words with a penetrating look under which Harcourt shrank into himself.

"It was——" began the wretched youth, impulsively, and then, suddenly conscious that he had half betrayed himself, he stopped short, threw his hands to his face and covered his eyes, for he was unable to bear the incisive gaze of his accuser.

"It was—well, what? What were you about to say that it was?" demanded the latter.

There was no reply, only the stricken youth seemed to collapse, to shrink more and more into himself.

"It was—— What was it, now? Can't you tell me?"

Still there came no answer from the wretched young man.

"No? You can't tell me? Then I will tell you, William Harcourt! It was—a murder!" whispered Hanson into the ear of the other.

"No! no! no! As the Lord hears me, it was not!" burst in passionate denial from the lips of the youth, who never moved from his shrunken posture, or uncovered his hidden eyes.

"It was a midnight murder!" emphatically repeated Hanson.

The young man shuddered as he broke forth in a sort of half-suppressed fierceness of denial.

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"It was not! Heaven truly knows that it was not! It was an accident!"

"It was an assassination!" sternly asserted the accuser, gazing on the accused, who sat cold, stony, frozen, only repeating with desperate effort:

"As I live and breathe, it was an accident—a pure and perfect accident."

"It was a midnight assassination, and you, William Harcourt, the midnight assassin!" repeated the accuser, with determined persistence.

A groan of irrepressible agony burst from the bosom of the despairing youth. His form shook as with an ague.

"May the Lord strike me dead this instant if I am a murderer!" he groaned, wringing his hands.

"You know the law would hold you as one, and punish you as one," coldly continued Hanson.

"It was entirely accidental!" moaned Harcourt, with a feeble, fatuitous iteration.

"Accidental!" sneered the accuser. "Well, it was accidental that I became a hidden witness to that crime."

"You!" exclaimed the wretched youth, shocked out of his reticence and self-possession—or what was left of it, dropping his hands from before his eyes and staring at the speaker.

"Yes, I. I, William Hanson, saw all that happened in Room No. 25, on last Thursday night, between two and three o'clock," replied the man, with great distinctness.

The youth sat with his head upon his bosom, his arms fallen each side of his chair, and his body sunk back in the collapse of final despair.

"Shall I tell you how I became an eyewitness of your crime?"

Harcourt moaned, but failed to speak.

"I will tell you, that you may know for a certainty I have the power of life and death over you," continued the accuser, watching the accused, to mark the effect of his words. He saw abject misery and despair; nothing more or less. He continued:

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"I occupy, as you know, Room No. 23, which is next to the corner room, No. 25. These rooms look out upon the south balcony. I am rather a restless sleeper, easily disturbed by light and sound, and needing darkness and silence to insure repose. That Thursday night, after the card playing, I went to my room at about eleven o'clock. The house was, even at that hour, very quiet; but there was a full moon, not shining directly into my chamber, it is true, for my window fronts south on the balcony, and the moon was high in the east; but still there was too much light from without that came into my room. I must give you these details so that you may understand the 'accident' by which I became the unseen and unsuspected witness of a crime."

The speaker paused, and looked keenly at his wretched companion, but saw no change in the utter despair of his attitude and expression.

"After preparing for bed," continued Hanson, "as it was so much too light for me, I closed my window shutters and drew down my shade, and made it nearly totally dark. But then—and 'hereby hangs a tale,' or rather a rope with a noose at the end of it."

He paused, and glanced furtively at his victim, who cowered as if he had received a lash.

"But then," resumed Hanson, "though my own room was dark, I was annoyed by a line of light from Room No. 25. The light—which was a bright beam of the moon piercing through a small knothole, about halfway up the wooden partition between the two rooms, shone across my room and flashed in the face of the looking-glass on my dressing table, and dazzled my eyes every time I turned to the front of my bed, which, by the way, stood sideways against the wooden partition. It was a trifle, but it kept me awake to become the witness of a crime—providentially, perhaps. What do you think?" demanded the narrator suddenly pausing in his story to put the question.

Harcourt never replied by word or look, and his accuser continued his story.

"I heard my neighbor come up into his room, lock

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his door, and move about, preparing to get into bed. I hoped that he would close his windows. He had two windows to that corner room—one south window, opening on the balcony in a line with mine, and one east window, opening on a roof. I knew that troublesome moonbeam came through the open east window, the moon being in the east. Pray, excuse these details; they are really necessary to the understanding of the case," said Hanson, interrupting himself to cast a deprecating and discriminating glance at his wretched companion.

But Harcourt might have been dead for any sign he gave.

"I heard Yelverton go to bed, and—without closing any of his windows. How I cursed him for a mere beast that could sleep when it was sleepy under any circumstances, I need not stop to tell. After a while I heard him snoring, while I still lay awake, tormented by the moonbeam as well as by the snores. Are you listening, or are you in a trance?" inquired the speaker, suddenly stopping and turning to his hearer.

"I am listening," replied a hollow voice, that seemed to come from subterranean depths rather than from the motionless man in that chair.

"Very well, then, I will go on. I lay awake, harassed by the snores and the moonbeam, until I heard some distant clock strike two. A few minutes later the sound of the snoring began to subside and finally ceased. Then I thought if I could stop up that knothole through which the moon shone I might go to sleep. I put out my hand and picked up one of my socks from the floor, and thought I would poke the toe of it into that troublesome hole. I stood up on my bed until my face was opposite the hole. I looked into the moonlit room and saw—but you were there! You know what I saw!"

"Oh, Lord in heaven! Why was I ever born?" wailed Harcourt, startled out of his stillness and wringing his hands above his head.

"Be still, or you will awaken our vigilant night watchman out of his snooze. Now will you be quiet?"

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Harcourt bowed his head.

Hanson resumed his narrative:

"You were there. Oh, how stealthily you must have entered! I never heard you, but I saw you in the brilliant, moonlit room. You did not see me with my eye at that knothole, for my room was dark; but I saw you and saw all that happened."

Harcourt made a gesture of desperation.

Hanson continued:

"You stood by his bedside. You took his trowsers; you searched the pockets and drew from them a packet and placed it in your bosom. At that moment Yelverton awoke, discovered you, seized a pistol from under his pillow and leveled it at your head. You sprang upon him and threw up his arm before he could pull the trigger. There was a momentary struggle for the possession of the pistol, then an explosion. Yelverton fell back, shot dead!"

"Oh, that it had been myself!" wailed the unfortunate youth.

"Indeed!" sneered Hanson. "I shouldn't have thought that to have been your sentiment at the time, for I think I never saw an instance of the instinct of self-preservation so instantaneous in asserting itself, or so promptly obeyed. One moment you gazed upon your victim, then darted to the door, locked it on the inside, leaving the key in it, snatched up another key from the floor, darted to the open window on the roof and closed it fast, darted to the open window on the balcony, passed through it and closed the shutters, which fastened by a spring on the inside, and could not be opened from the outside. Thus you made good your escape, leaving the room locked and bolted from within, even while the roused house was hurrying along the hall toward the spot from which the report of the pistol had been heard. They tried the door, and, finding it locked on the inside, burst it open. They found the man dead in his bed. They found the windows fastened on the inside. No one could have entered the room, they said. Yelverton had shot himself. He had attempted suicide once be-

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fore, it was said. Everyone was shocked, but no one was much surprised. A man who led such a life as Yelverton might have ended it by his own hand at any time these ten years past. Such was public opinion. Only one man knew the facts of the case. That man was myself. But I gave no sign."

"Why did you not?" breathed Harcourt, in a hollow tone.

"Because the secret was too valuable to be thrown away."

"But as you saw all that occurred, you must have seen that it was an accident!" pleaded Harcourt.

"An accident? Was it accident that you stole to Yelverton's room in the dead of night, to rob him of his money?"

"No, no; not to rob him—to get back my own, or what was more sacred than my own—another man's money that had been intrusted to my keeping," moaned Harcourt.

"And that you staked at the table and lost to Yelverton."

"A blackleg—a sharper, who won by cheating," broke in the youth, in a tone of desperation.

"Don't malign the dead!" sternly commanded Hanson.

"I do not wish to, but I told the plain truth."

"What business had you to be in the company of a blackleg and a sharper, and, of all things, what right had you to stake another man's money?"

"I did not then know him for what he was. I thought he was a gentleman of the highest order. He was held in such high favor here."

"Because he spent so freely money that was won by cheating at cards."

"I never would have played with him if I had known his character, and never would have drank with him if I had known the infernal power of wine to deprive me of reason and conscience."

"But you have not answered my question: What right had you to stake another man's money?"

"None! none! Oh, God! 'Easy is the descent to

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hell!'" groaned the miserable criminal, tearing his hair.

"Yes," assented Hanson, coldly; "and in your case it was not only a descent—it was a plunge, a tumble, a dive. You were halfway down before you realized that you had started. But come! you need not go headlong to the bottomless pit, unless you choose," he added, speaking for the first time encouragingly.

"I am there already!" moaned the youth. He never spoke but with a wail or a moan.

"Nonsense! Brace up! Come, now! I am willing to admit that, from your point of view, the death of Yelverton may have seemed an accident; but under the circumstances of your presence in the room, no jury in this world would call it an accident. The law would call it a murder."

"I was trying to wrest the pistol away, to prevent him from shooting me, when it went off and killed him."

"And he was trying to prevent your escape with his property, when the pistol went off, shot and killed him. The law would call it murder, my boy. But come! Do not despair. You acted, one might almost say, in self-defense—though in self-defense while committing a robbery. You did not mean to become a criminal. You did not voluntarily descend into the dark abyss. You made one misstep and fell headlong."

"Oh, that first misstep!" groaned Harcourt.

"The money intrusted to you by a guest of the house, to be locked in the safe for security, you only borrowed for a few hours, as you thought. You staked it, hoping to win. You lost it by the chicanery of your adversary. You felt that your name, your honor, your liberty, all depended on your regaining that money. You went to get it, using your office pass key to gain admittance into the gambler's bedroom. You were discovered in the act."

The youth groaned and shuddered.

"But as they did not know anything about the reality of the case, and judged from appearances, the

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Dogberries of our neighborhood found the death to be a suicide."

"Their verdict was that 'Nathan Yelverton came to his death by a bullet shot into his brain from a pistol held in his hand.' This verdict was literally true. The pistol was in his hand when the shot was fired," said Harcourt, speaking with difficulty.

"Yes, the pistol was in his hand, but he did not fire it. The pistol was in your hand, also, for you had hold of it trying to wrest it from him. And between you the weapon was discharged, and Yelverton killed."

"It was an——"

"Now, don't say that again; it is stupid and monotonous. Pull yourself together, man, and face the music. The C.'s J. have found it suicide, and suicide it rests. Poor Yelverton's body has this day been given up to his friends, and shipped to Washington to be buried there, with the stigma of suicide on his name. The curtain has fallen on the last act of the tragedy. This settles it—unless the hidden witness of the crime should come forward to give information," concluded Hanson, with a penetrating gaze into the gloomy face of his companion.

"Why did you not give information before the coroner's jury?" demanded Harcourt, in a tone of despair. Every intonation of his voice, as well as every line of his face and turn of his body, was full of despair.

"Why? Because, in the first place, I never was called as a witness; in the second place, I make it a rule of life never to give anything for nothing; in the third place, I kept silence that I might sell it to you."

"To me?"

"To you."

"I am too poor to offer you a bribe, Mr. Hanson."

"And I too rich to need a bribe of the sort you must mean. Bah! Don't you see that you insult me, man?"

"I did not mean it."

"Of course not."

"What, then, do you want?"

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"Not your money, even if you had it to offer me. I wish you, in return for my silence, to do something for me."

"What is it?"

Hanson bent nearer to the drooping figure before him, and peered into the deathlike face.

"I want you," he said, "to do something that will so severely try you, rack you, madden you, that you could never consent to do it but to save you from a shameful death, your aged mother from a broken heart, and your betrothed bride from a blighted life."

He spoke slowly, solemnly, impressively, keeping his eyes fixed on the tragic face of the youth.

"Tell me! tell me!" exclaimed the latter. "For myself —ah!—Heaven truly knows that I would rather die than live! I would welcome annihilation with infinite relief—as an eternal, dreamless sleep. But for my poor mother and Roma—oh! for Roma!—I would do anything—anything—to avoid disgrace—disgrace that would more than kill them! Tell me what it is you wish to me to do. I would give my body to the flames, I would give my soul to the fiend, to save them from certain madness or death. What is it I am to do?" demanded Harcourt, in a voice of desperation.

"I will tell you later. You are too much excited now. I will leave you to think over your position, and meditate upon the sacrifice you would be willing to make for safety. Meet me on the Serpent's Back at sunrise to-morrow. Good-night, or rather, good-morning—for it is nearly three o'clock," said Hanson, turning to leave the office.

"Stay! One moment, Mr. Hanson!" exclaimed the youth, holding out his hand imploringly toward his departing visitor.

"Well?" roughly demanded the latter, as he returned to the desk. "What do you want of me now? It is late. I am tired and sleepy, and must turn in, so be brief."

"I only wished to ask you to give me some slight

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idea of the service you require at my hands," he pleaded.

The other man scanned his wretched face in silence.

"Only to assure me that it is not a crime," he prayed.

"You have grown fastidious since Thursday night. Well, this is

" 'A deed without a name,' "

sneered Hanson, and he was gone.

CHAPTER II

ROMA FRONDE

Roma Fronde, at the age of twenty-one, found herself the independent mistress of Goblin Hall, a weird, old manor house, buried in deep woods and hemmed in by high hills, in the northwestern part of Maryland.

Here she lived alone, with her widowed aunt for chaperon.

Her mother had passed away in the hour when Roma first saw the light.

Her sorrowing father never took a second wife, but invited his young, widowed and childless sister to take charge of his household and assist him in the care and training of his infant daughter, upon whom, as she grew and developed into childhood and womanhood, he lavished all his affections and more than enough of his wealth.

She was sent to the best schools in the country, and had the best masters and mistresses in every department of learning and accomplishments.

It was during her school days that our civil war broke out, and her father took service under Gen. Lee. In this interval, also, her young aunt had married again, and was the mother of two bouncing boys.

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But she still lived at Goblin Hall, where her husband, Mark Elde, had charge of the estate while his brother-in-law was in the army, until he, too, was drafted for military service, and was obliged to go.

Ruth Elde never saw her husband or her brother again. Both were killed in the battle of Hatcher's Run. Their bodies were never recovered.

So well had Roma Fronde profited by her native talents and excellent opportunities that, at the age of eighteen, she returned home as thoroughly accomplished as schools and colleges, masters and mistresses, could make her; but it requires life to carry on a woman's education, and even that does not complete it.

Roma came home to meet the news of her awful bereavement, and to find her widowed aunt bowed down with grief and despair.

But poverty was not added to their afflictions. Roma's estate was fairly prosperous. It was remote from the course of the human tornado; the soldiers, neither blue nor gray, had come near it; the negroes had not deserted it.

Besides this patrimony, Roma possessed other property. Her father's uncle, a very wealthy Californian, had died a bachelor, at an advanced age, and had left her, his only living relative, the whole of his fortune—bank stock and gold mines. Very recently, also, another great-uncle on the mother's side had expired, full of years, and bequeathed to her the remnant of his once magnificent estate—the Isle of Storms.

Roma was rich, and she shared her riches and her home with the widowed aunt and orphan cousins.

For many months Ruth Elde and Roma Fronde mourned husband and father, and refused to be comforted by faith or philosophy.

But it is a morbid and unhealthy heart, under unusual circumstances, that mourns forever.

Time and nature oppose grief and despair over the past.

As the year rolled around, the two women began

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to be surprised and somewhat shocked to feel their spirits reviving, cheerfulness returning, new interest in life beginning, even a new longing for change and society springing up.

Ruth Elde was at this time a very handsome matron, scarcely yet forty years of age, of middle size, plump form, brown skin, with red lips, dark hazel eyes, and crinkling black hair; and she was beginning to be as full of sparkling ambition as she had been in her younger and happier days.

Roma Fronde, at the age of nineteen, was a magnificent blonde beauty of the goddess Juno type, tall, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, long-limbed, with a stately head adorned with an abundance of bright, red-gold hair, curling around a wide, white forehead and massed at the nape of a fine neck. Her features were purely Grecian, with straight nose, full lips and round chin. Her fair throat and neck curved out into a superb bust. Her complexion was that of the white rose with the delicate tint of pink sometimes seen at the heart of that exquisite flower. Her eyes were of the rich, soft, dark brown that often goes with the curling, red-gold hair. Her hands and feet were perfectly formed. In character she was true, just, intellectual and independent. In temperament gay, serene, affectionate and benevolent.

Both these women were fitted more for social than for secluded lives. And they began to feel the dullness of their solitude.

Yet each thought more of the other than of herself.

When Ruth Elde looked at her grandly beautiful niece, she thought:

"What a shame she should be buried in this wilderness, where she sees no one now but old Parson Shaw and old Dr. Keech, and a few old country folks, who are too spiritless, poor things, even to give a tea party. No young men. Ah, me! All killed in the war, or nearly all, from about here. Why, the girl, with all her wealth and beauty, will die an old maid if I do not take her away from here! Why, she is nineteen

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now. And I married at sixteen! We really must go away somewhere for a while."

And she would look so grave over it all that Roma, mistaking the cause of her gloom, would say to herself:

"Poor, dear aunt Ruth! She wants a change, and she ought to have it. Here she has been mewed up in this old house ever since I can remember, and all the time I was at school, and she has never left it. If I don't take her away somewhere she will grow old before her time. We really must go somewhere soon."

When two people in the same house are of the same mind, they soon come to an understanding.

Circumstances helped to bring these two to a mutual explanation.

That autumn a neighbor of theirs was elected to represent the district in Congress. And he was to take his motherless daughters to Washington late in November.

Also Roma, who kept up a regular correspondence with her school friends, got a letter from her dearest classmate and sweetest sweetheart, Rebecca Bushe, of New York, telling that her father, her mother, herself and her brother were all going to Washington to spend the winter; that they had taken a furnished house on Lafayette Square for the season, and—oughtn't Roma, couldn't Roma, wouldn't Roma come and visit them there? And then followed a gorgeous description of the attractions of Washington, and of their program for the winter.

Roma handed the letter to her aunt.

"Oh, go, my love! Go, by all means!" exclaimed the widow.

"And leave you alone here? Not at all. But, little auntie, if you like, we will both go to Washington and engage rooms in some hotel. I shall like that better, for I shall be more independent there than as a visitor at the Bushes'," replied Roma.

"Very well, my dear," chirped the widow. "I shall be delighted."

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"So will our neighbor, the new Congressman, Gray," said Roma, gayly.

"And you and your friend, Miss Bushe, can see as much of each other as you please," said Mrs. Elde, utterly ignoring Roma's last remark.

So it was settled that they should go to the national capital in November.

They went to Washington and took apartments in one of the best West End hotels.

And in the natural rebound of their spirits from long dullness and depression, they entered eagerly into all social life of the city.

Joel Gray, their district Congressman, constituted himself the special escort of the "sparkling widow," and she in her turn became the chaperon of his two daughters, and took them, with Roma, to all places of public amusement.

Roma renewed her intimacy with Reba Bushe, and the girls were almost always together, either in private at each other's rooms, or in public at balls, concerts or receptions.

Roma's superb style of beauty was a novelty, a surprise, in fashionable circles. Some demurrers found her too tall and large, too strong and robust, too suggestive of the battle-ax heroines of ancient or mediæval song and fable. But for all that, Roma was from the first very much admired, and, as she became better known, adored.

In her first season she became a reigning belle in the national capital. She had several "eligible" offers of marriage, but she declined them all, and, at the close of the season, she left the city as heart-whole as she had entered it.

She returned with her aunt and the two boys to Goblin Hall. But they did not stay there.

These two women, so long secluded from the world, re-entered it with zeal.

Roma especially delighted in the society which she adorned, and by which she was worshiped.

They went to Long Branch for June and July, to Newport for August, and to the White Mountains for

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September. Everywhere Roma Fronde reaped new laurels, made new conquests, but returned from her summer and autumn tour still as "fancy free" as when she first left home.

They spent a part of October and the whole of November at Goblin Hall; and, on the first of December, they went again to Washington for the winter, where they passed a very gay and triumphant season.

It was the long session of Congress, and the season was protracted until the pleasures of society began to pall upon both the women.

A sort of homesickness came over them. They returned to Goblin Hall in May, with no intention of leaving it again for many months.

And now the "sparkling widow" awoke to the sense of her maternal duties. One morning she astonished Roma by exclaiming:

"I'm a beast! It's shameful how I have neglected the education of my two boys!"

"Hear wot she say, doane yer? Dat's de trufe, for a fac'! Put dat in your pipe and smoke it!"

The last voice startled no one. It came from a huge, very black negro, with aldermanic rotundity, big shoulders, bull neck and bullet head, covered with short, crinkled black hair. He had a most benign, fatherly, even patriarchal, countenance. His father had afflicted him with the name of Pontius Pilate, which negro dialect rendered into Pompous Pirate. He had only come into the room to put some light wood and pine cones on the little, open fire which the cool spring morning made acceptable.

No one answered him. Being a privileged family servant, who had remained attached to the house during all the revolutions of the Civil War and the Emancipation Act, he was allowed to put in his word on all occasions; but he was not always drawn into counsel.

"The boys are very young now. They should be allowed to run at large here in the country, and develop physical health and strength for some time yet," sagely advised Roma.

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"And develop into stupid clodhoppers. No, thank you, Roma. And they are not so young, neither. Here's Rudy, eight years old, and Ab nine, and I don't believe either of them have the slightest idea that 'the earth is round like an apple or an orange,' or that 'George Washington was the father of his country.' I say it is shameful. And I dreaming that Abbot might become President of the United States, and Rudolph Chief Justice of the Supreme Court!" complained Mrs. Elde.

"Trufe, for a sullum fac'! Put dat in your pipe an' smoke it!" exclaimed "Pompous Pirate."

"Send them to school," said Roma.

"You know there isn't a school within ten miles of this place. And I am sure I wouldn't send them away from home."

"Then engage a governess."

"And make my boys milksops. No, indeed. They must be trained by a man, if by anybody."

"Then advertise for a resident tutor."

"That is a good idea, Roma, if you would not object to having one in the house."

"Why should I object?" inquired the young lady, lifting her brows.

"I don't know, I am sure. Well, I will advertise. I'll go and write out the advertisement at once, and send it to the post office right away," answered the widow. And she went.

The advertisement was sent to the Washington and Baltimore papers.

Within a week came many responses.

The one they liked best was from William Harcourt, of Virginia, and the testimonials that came with his letter represented him as "the son of the late Everard Harcourt, of Lone Lodge, Virginia, and an undergraduate of Williamsburg College; a young gentleman of exemplary moral character and superior scholastic attaintments."

"What a bombastic style!" said Roma, with a laugh.

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"Anyhow, this young man is the fellow for my money. What do you say, Roma?"

"I think he will do."

"The son of Everard Harcourt, of Lone Lodge. Why, we have heard of him! How does his son come to be wanting a tutor's place?"

"Another instance of 'ruined by the war,' I suppose."

"Yes; that must be it. I wish he had inclosed his photograph."

"Auntie! Why, that would have been an impertinence! What on earth should his photograph have to do with his getting his position here?" exclaimed Roma.

"I don't know," replied the widow, who could seldom give a reason for the faith, the doubt, or the thought that was in her.

However, she wrote promptly and commenced negotiations with William Harcourt.

It was arranged that he should come to Goblin Hall in June, after the end of his present college term, and should enter upon his duties of tutor on the first of July, to continue one year from date.

The arrival of the tutor was anticipated with intense interest by all the little household. The widow looked forward to the coming of a new inmate, a well-connected young man, as to an agreeable addition to their small, dull home circle.

Roma expected him with some sympathy for his probable poverty and endeavors.

The two boys were really divided between delight and disgust, according to their moods. They very much liked the idea of a young man coming to stay in the house all the time and help to make things lively about the gloomy old place; but they very much didn't like the idea of study. Abbot had no objection to becoming President of the United States at some future period, but, then, he preferred to be carried to the White House

"On flowery beds of ease,"

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as the hymn says, while Rudolph felt not the faintest aspirations toward the Chief Justiceship of the Supreme Court.

The day of young Harcourt's expected arrival approached, and the two isolated women prepared for his reception as for that of a distinguished guest. The best spare room on the first floor front was made ready for him. When the day really came, "Pompous Pirate" was sent with the family carriage to meet him at the nearest railway station, and a sumptuous supper was ordered. The day was an eventful one in the monotonous life at Goblin Hall.

At sunset the carriage containing the new tutor rolled up to the house.

The coachman got off his seat and went up the steps to knock; but before he could do so the door flew open with hospitable alacrity, and there stood Mrs. Elde and Miss Fronde ready to welcome the newcomer.

He was a very thin, pale, dark young man, with black hair and mustache, and large, dark, somber eyes.

He bowed with grave reverence before the two ladies.

"Mr. Harcourt, I presume?" said the widow.

"At your service, madam."

"I am Mrs. Elde."

He bowed.

"And this young lady is my niece, Miss Fronde."

He bowed to Miss Fronde. She returned the salute; and both looked up, and their eyes met.

"Come in now, Mr. Harcourt. The servant will take your bag and show you to your room. You will just have half an hour to get ready before supper will be placed upon the table," said Mrs. Elde, leading the way into the hall, followed by Miss Fronde and Mr. Harcourt.

Pontius Pilate left his carriage in charge of his son to drive it around to the stable, while he himself came in the house to perform his other functions as "groom of the chambers."

Young Harcourt was soothed. He was received as

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an honored guest; not as a "hireling" and "dependent," as, in some bitterness of spirit, he had called himself in accepting his first "situation."

William Harcourt was another case of adversity resulting from the idleness, extravagance and improvidence of a proud, wealthy and aristocratic family, continued from generation to generation.

He was the last of a long line of extensive and powerful landholders; yet not a stick or stone of his forefathers' acres had come down to him.

His father—a colonel in the Confederate army—had been killed in the first battle of Bull Run. His four brothers—all older than himself—had entered the army, and had fallen on other battlefields. Two sisters, also older than himself, had died at home of fever, that might not have been fatal but for the depressing effects of sorrow and privation. He was the only remaining child of his aged and widowed mother—her latest born—her boy.

"Will," as that poor mother fondly called him, was talented and ambitious. He had been at school during the war, and had passed one term in the freshman's class at Williamsburg College, when the final crash of ruin came to his family.

The house, furniture, land and stock were sold at auction, under a mortgage, and his poor mother, having lost so much, now lost her home, and must have been houseless but for the devotion of one of her own emancipated slaves, who gave her shelter, and reverenced her as if she had been a dethroned queen.

She kept her misfortunes from the knowledge of her boy until his return from college, lest he should leave before the term should expire.

When he reached home—his home no more—and heard the news of the ruin, his grief was almost inconsolable.

His mother tried to comfort him.

It did not matter much for her, she said, because her pilgrimage on earth was almost at an end. Nor did it matter at all for him, she insisted. He was

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young, talented, energetic, and this reverse should put him on his mettle.

"Will" sold his watch and all his little trinkets; sold his beloved books, and every suit of clothing except one of rusty black cloth, and two or three changes of underwear.

Then he gave all the money to his mother, except just enough to pay his expenses to Maryland, whither he was going to take the position of tutor to the two sons of Mrs. Ruth Elde.

At first he had felt some false shame—the outcome of false pride—in taking what seemed to him to be a menial position. But the manner of his reception at Goblin Hall had dissipated this.

When he had refreshed his toilet, he went downstairs to the drawing room, where he found the two ladies, and also the two lads who were to become his pupils—bright, frank, dark-haired and rosy-cheeked boys, very like their mother.

That evening he made the acquaintance of Roma Fronde, the glorious, amazonian beauty, who for two seasons past had run the gantlet of the national capital and of all the fashionable watering places, and had refused the alliance of some of the most brilliant men in society, and come back to the country, fancy free, to be fascinated by the pale, dark, hollow-cheeked student, with the somber eyes, and in the rusty black suit.

It was a case of mutual attraction at sight between the dark, melancholy Harcourt and the fair, radiant Roma Fronde.

On the youth's side it was more than that; it was an instance of impassioned, adoring love at first meeting.

On the lady's, it was a case of deepest sympathy in the misfortunes of the picturesque, misanthropic youth.

Under the same roof, meeting every day on equal terms, sitting at the same table, spending every evening together in this lonely country house, they had

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abundant opportunity of becoming intimately acquainted with each other.

She drew from him all the sad story of his family ruin, his poor mother's bereavement of husband, home and children, except himself, and of his ambition to get on in life, to make her last days easy, if not happy.

Roma sympathized with him, and counseled him to be brave and patiently work and endure until above the wreck of his family fortunes he should raise the structure of a worthy prosperity.

"Persevering labor is the only road to honorable success," she said.

"Put dat in your pipe and smoke it, young marse. It's de Loramity's truff, for a fac'," interjected the ubiquitous Pompous, who happened to hear the talk.

No one replied; no one ever did reply to the "pirate's" spasmodic interpolations.

Roma recognized young Harcourt's talent, and appreciated his ambition, but she did rebuke the morbid pride, inherited from generations of wrong-headed forefathers, which led him to take false views of life and duty, and to look upon his sacred calling of a teacher of childhood as menial service.

"If it were required of me," she said, "there is no honest work, however hard or humble, that I would not willingly take up and perform with my best ability, and never feel humiliated by it, unless I had slighted or neglected my duty in it."

He shook his head.

"Heaven forbid you should ever be put to the trial," he said.

"I should not shrink from it. Work is good. Service is holy. What lesson did the Son of God mean to teach us when he washed his disciples' feet?"

Much more to the same effect Roma said to him on occasion, and often while she spoke he felt his pride to be a very poor and pitiable thing. The year for which he had been engaged drew to a close.

Before it ended William Harcourt and Roma Fronde were betrothed.

This promised to be a long betrothal, for the young

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man had his fortune to make before he could marry; he could not bear the thought of living on his wife's money.

His engagement ended on the first of July.

Mrs. Elde and Miss Fronde made preparations to go to Mount Desert.

Harcourt left them at the end of his term of service. He went encouraged and supported by the strong and bracing faith and hope with which his betrothed had inspired him. He had saved money enough to make his mother comfortable in her little cottage for the winter, and to pay for one more term at college for himself.

He went to his mother first, to spend the midsummer vacation with her, and he made her heart glad with the news of his betrothal to Miss Fronde.

In September he went back to his college, and entered upon a fresh course of study.

He was obliged to economize severely. He took a small room in the town, at a very low rent. Here he ate and slept, and waited on himself; made his bed, washed and ironed his linen, mended his clothes, and lived on coffee without milk or sugar, and corn bread without butter.

He applied himself diligently to study, allowed himself little rest, and no recreation.

The result of this was that his health broke down.

At Christmas he received a pressing invitation from Mrs. Elde and Miss Fronde, to come and bring his mother to spend the holidays at Goblin Hall, but he had no money to pay expenses of the journey to the Hall, nor even enough for the much shorter journey to his mother's cottage.

But he walked thither, a distance of forty miles, and arrived looking so pale and worn that the poor widow was thrown into the deepest distress and anxiety at his appearance.

He made light of his weakness, however, and revived her spirits.

At the end of these holidays, Job, the faithful servant already mentioned, managed to borrow a horse

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from one neighbor, and a buggy from another, and drove the young master back to college.

The wearing life of hard work, hard study and severe privations recommenced.

The year rolled around to the midsummer vacation again.

Roma Fronde, with whom he had kept up a constant correspondence, wrote to him that her aunt and herself, with the two boys, were going to Nahant for the summer, and inquired if it were not possible for him to join them there.

It was impossible.

And yet, that was just what one of the friendly professors had strongly advised him to do, telling him that he needed the sea air to brace him up. About this time he heard, through a friend, that he might get the place of office clerk at the Crest House, on the Isle of Storms.

He wrote to the proprietor and secured the position. It would afford him the much-needed sea air, and enable him to earn and save money enough to help his mother, and to pay for his next course at college.

In this way it happened that on the first of July, 186—, William Harcourt, late of Lone Lodge, in Virginia, became hotel clerk at the Crest House, Isle of Storms.

CHAPTER III

THE ISLE OF STORMS

"The Isle of Storms," sometimes called "The Serpent," lies in the Chesapeake Bay, a few miles off the east coast of Maryland.

It is called The Isle of Storms because in high winds a maelstrom swirls around its shore, making all approach or departure impossible while the whirlwinds and whirlpools roar, and rage, and lash each other.

It is called The Serpent, from its shape, which is

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very suggestive of that crested and crawling reptile. It runs in winding curves from north to south, making a succession of little bays on the east and west sides. The Crest, or highest and rockiest end of the isle, heads to the south. The tail, or vanishing point, disappears toward the north. Its length, following the bends of the land, is about five miles. Its breadth at the high, rocky Crest, is about one mile, whence it gradually descends and diminishes in a narrow ridge, simulating the back of the Serpent, to the tail, or vanishing point.

Only the southern half of the isle, with the Crest, had ever been available for cultivation.

Here, on the highest part of the Crest, once stood a solitary old mansion, facing the south, with the sea sounding around three sides of it, fifty feet below.

It was a rude, square, gray stone house, two stories high, with sloping roof and big chimneys—two at each end—a row of dormer windows in the roof, and two rows of high windows, one above the other, in the front wall.

The lower row was divided by a broad double door, sheltered by a roofed portico, from which a flight of seven broad, stone steps, moss-grown and moldy, led down to the ground.

An old, overgrown, entangled garden; an old orchard of gnarled and twisted apple and pear trees; an old, decaying vineyard, with trellises broken down, and grapevines trailing on the ground, and old, exhausted fields and pastures, overgrown with coarse grass and thistles, surrounded the old mansion.

Dilapidated barns, stables, negroes' huts and storehouses, moldering garden walls and fallen fences further disfigured this wilderness.

The place had been deserted years before, except by two or three trespassing fishermen, who had built their huts on the Ridge above high-water mark, where the coarse sea grass was the only vegetation, and whose little boats were moored right and left on the beach below.

From the date of the first settlement of the Prov-

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ince of Maryland by Calvert and his adventurous band of English and French Catholics, this isle had been the property of the Guyons, a family of Norman descent.

It had once been the scene of substantial comfort and lavish hospitality. But years of high living through many generations had slowly, but too surely, sapped the substance of the family, until, some few years before the opening of this story, the last of the Guyons had been forced, by stress of want, to lease the lone isle to a rich speculator, who immediately began to clear away the ruins, repair the old, gray-stone house, and run up lath and plaster annexes on each end, reaching far to the front and rear of the mansion, thus making the form of the letter H, of which the original building was the crosspiece.

When Thomas Todd had completed his improvements he advertised for summer boarders.

The many attractions of the place, its novelty, pure air, salt bathing, sailing, rowing, fishing, crabbing, water fowling, etc., soon filled the house with guests.

Every season increased its popularity. As the years went by, Todd realized cent per cent on his investments.

But now, at the time of which we write, the tenth season of the favorite sea resort, and the last year of the lease, was drawing to a close.

In this last year something had happened to affect the interests of Todd. His landlord, Henry Guyon, had passed away from earth, and left a grand-niece, who was his heir at law, and who had just attained her majority.

This young lady, Roma Fronde, had much wealth from other sources, and did not require the rental of the Isle of Storms; and it was rumored that she would not renew the lease to Todd.

Though the heiress had given no warning to this effect, the rumor worried Todd. He thought that he must either yield up the place, where he was coining money, or else pay such an exorbitant rent on the renewal of his lease as to considerably reduce his prof-

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its. He suspected that the unpleasant rumor was, perhaps, a ruse by which the heiress meant to get a higher rent, and he resolved to contend for the very last dollar he could save, yet, if necessary, to pay double the rent rather than vacate the Isle of Storms, on which he was rapidly making a fortune.

But Tom Todd, as his familiars called him, was mistaken as to the motives and intentions of the young heiress.

She did not care for the larger rent, nor did she mean to renew the lease of the Serpent on any terms whatever. She wished to reclaim the Isle of Storms, because it had been in her family from the first settlement of the country, and was her inherited property; to take down the hotel lath and plaster buildings, and to restore the old manor house to its former dignity as the private residence of the proprietor; to revive its old rôle of lavish hospitality by living there a portion of every summer, and playing the hostess to a circle of select friends whom she would gather around her. And when, if ever, she and her young lover should marry, their honeymoon should be passed there in their own fine island home.

This was her dream.

Affairs were in this condition when Tom Todd, finding the office work, which, to save the expense of a clerk, he had hitherto performed in person, was getting too much for him, engaged the services of William Harcourt.

The young student soon found that he was expected to make himself agreeable in the ballroom and sociable in the cardroom when off duty in the office. There was a scarcity of young men in the house full of guests. Most of them were attending to their business at home, and many of them, if taking any holiday, were yachting on the ocean, or camping on the mountains. Often male partners were wanted in the dances, or a hand at a card table.

Young Will Harcourt was handsome, graceful and attractive, and soon became very popular in the house. When not wanted in the ballroom, he was sure to be

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in the cardroom, and vice versa. Sometimes he was required in both places at once, even while his office duties kept him chained to his writing desk.

The card table had a dangerous fascination for him, even when there was no money staked, and had had from his childhood up. He thought no harm of it, even when wine was placed upon the table with the cards, and the players drank freely. From his boyhood up he had been used to seeing his father and brothers with their friends play cards and win and lose money, and drink wine or brandy to the verge of—let us say —exhilaration.

Liquors of all sorts always stood upon the sideboard in the dining room at home, and every one might help himself at will. Well he remembered the red morocco liquor and wine stands that stood at each end of the sideboard, with their cut-glass decanters, each with its silver chain and crescent around its neck, engraved with the name of the special beverage it decorated.

His fathers and brothers were habitual drinkers, yet never thought themselves intemperate. Even the dear mother liked her nightly glass of toddy as a "nightcap," and the young sisters liked their sweet wine sometimes.

Only Will, himself, had no taste at all for "spirituous liquors," as the last Everard Harcourt elegantly called his intoxicating drinks.

Will hated the taste and smell of them all, until he came to the Serpent, and for the first time tasted—champagne! It was different from all the other wines and liquors he had ever seen or smelt. An old gentleman, whose partner he was at euchre, had ordered a bottle of Veuve Cliquot, and invited Will to take a glass with him, and from that time the boy liked champagne, though he still cared for no other wine, and really detested stronger drinks.

And so he gradually fell into the habit of card playing and wine drinking in the way of extra duty, helping to entertain the guests at the hotel.

Many of his father's old friends were at the house, and they showed him great kindness as the son of the

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late Everard Harcourt, of Lone Lodge. In his adversity he received from them almost the honors of a hero and martyr. They looked upon him as one of the ruined victims of the war, and respected his independence of spirit in taking his humble and laborious situation in order to help his aged mother and educate himself. And some of these gentlemen thought they were doing him great kindness in pressing him to drink wine, and allowing him to win a little of their money. This, they thought, was the most delicate way of helping him. And it was also the most self-sacrificing, for they hated to be beaten at cards, even with their own consent. But with all their good intentions, these were the deadliest injuries they could have done the widow's son, for they were inspiring him with a passion for play, and infecting him with an appetite for wine. Surely their good intentions were paving the way to perdition.

Will Harcourt, seeing no harm, fearing no danger, was happier now than he had ever been at any time since his young boyhood. He corresponded regularly with his mother and with his betrothed, and gave them cheering accounts of his great improvement in health, and his acquisition of friends, and he received happy, encouraging letters from them.

And all went well until one fatal Thursday evening, near the last of the season.

Will Harcourt was sitting in the office, with a few gentlemen, who sometimes dropped in at night to smoke, drink, play cards, or to do all three.

Among them was William Hanson, whom he had known before at Williamsburg, and even at Goblin Hall, where he sometimes visited.

The office hours were fairly over. The duties of the desk were done for the day. The last trip of the ferryboat, that plied three times daily between the mainland and the isle, had been made, and she was moored for the night. She had brought no new guests, nor had any been expected, for it was now very late in the season, and people were gradually going, not coming. The office clerk had finished his accounts for the day,

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closed his books, locked his desk, and come out from behind his counter into the body of the room, where the few men were sitting around the little tables playing cards.

One—Nathan Yelverton—a noted gambler, whose passion for gambling was so great that he would play even when there was but little to gain, was standing up and looking on.

Seeing the clerk now at leisure, he challenged him for a game.

And the youth sat down to play. It was still expected of him, when off his regular duty, to take a hand at cards, or a place in a quadrille, whenever it might be required of him.

The cards were dealt and the players had just begun, when a commotion in the hall was followed by the opening of the office door, and the entrance of a late and unexpected guest, who came bustling in, followed by a porter carrying his carpetbag.

The visitor explained that he had landed from a passing yacht, and would like a bedroom, if one could be got.

The hotel clerk apologized to his adversary, laid down his cards, and rose to attend to the newly arrived guest.

The latter registered his name as Charles Cutts, Baltimore.

Harcourt assigned him a room, gave the key to the porter and directed the latter to show the gentleman the way.

It was then that Cutts suddenly seemed to remember something, put his hand in his breast pocket and drew forth a stout pocketbook, which he laid upon the counter. Then he stooped and whispered:

"Count the money, give me a receipt and lock it up in your safe till the morning."

"All right," said Harcourt.

And he opened the wallet and counted the money, for which he wrote an acknowledgment, which he handed to Cutts, who then left the office, attended by the porter, to retire to his bedroom.

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Only two of the men present had noticed this money transaction. One was Yelverton, the gambler; the other was Hanson, the exquisite.

"Come, hurry up, old fellow!" Yelverton exclaimed.

And the clerk, instead of locking the wallet up in the safe, put it carefully in the breast pocket of his coat, which he buttoned up securely. Then he hurried to the table, not to keep the guest waiting.

Both Yelverton and Hanson saw what he did with the wallet.

Will Harcourt intended to lock the money in the safe before retiring to bed. But—"Hell is paved with good intentions."

Yelverton ordered a bottle of champagne and two glasses.

The wine was brought and opened and the glasses filled.

Then Yelverton invited Will Harcourt to pledge him.

And they emptied their glasses.

"We will play for small stakes, just to give an interest to the game," said Yelverton.

And he laid down a dollar.

Will Harcourt laid down another, but did not think it was a small stake for him, and hoped he would not lose it.

They threw their cards.

Will won.

They played again, and again he won.

"You are lucky, my boy. Let us double the stakes," exclaimed Yelverton.

And they were doubled, and again Will won.

"By the pipers that played before Moses! we will double the stakes again?" exclaimed Yelverton.

And they were doubled once more, and once more Will won.

"You will clean me out presently. Come! I shall have to take another glass of wine to spur my wits or sustain my courage," said the gambler, and filled the glasses.

Will Harcourt felt what he had drank, and hesi-

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tated to drink more. But Yelverton pressed the wine upon him, and he drained the glass.

Then they resumed their game, doubling stakes every time, and Will winning.

Meanwhile, one by one, the other men, having finished their games and their pipes, dropped off to bed.

Only Hanson remained to watch these last players. Hanson sat in a shady corner of the office, with his chair tilted back, and a cigar between his lips, apparently unobservant and half asleep; but no word, movement or look of the players escaped him.

Yelverton ordered another bottle of champagne. It was brought and opened, and the glasses were filled.

Poor Will needed no pressing now to drink. The third glass of wine, at which he had first hesitated, but to which he had finally succumbed, had proved so much too much for him that it had disturbed his discretion, so that now he did not scruple to take a fourth glass, and would not have refused to take any number of glasses in succession.

They went on playing and doubling stakes, Will Harcourt wild, delirious with champagne and triumph. To the madness of intoxication was now added the infernal delight of hauling in large sums of money that he had not earned. In his insanity he dreamed that he should rise from the table with thousands—with his fortune made.

He lost his reason, lost his senses, lost his conscience.

He won every time, until he had won one thousand and twenty-four dollars, the result of the last doubling.

With fatal fatuity, he felt sure of winning until he should break his adversary.

He staked his winnings again.

Yelverton covered them.

There was now the sum of two thousand and forty-eight dollars on the board.

The cards were thrown again, and Yelverton won the pile!

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Harcourt looked surprised; then aghast. He had begun by staking one dollar. He had gone on winning until he had won over a thousand and now he had lost that!

Yelverton was perfectly cool.

"Cover that," he said, calmly, clapping his hand on the money.

Will was now beyond the control of prudence, reason or conscience. He produced the wallet of the stranger, and covered the stakes.

The cards were thrown again.

Yelverton won again!

He laughed, as if in surprise at his turn of luck, though this was what he had been scheming for all the evening, with perfect certainty of the result. He tapped the money gayly, and said:

"Cover that!"

"I cannot," faltered the dismayed youth.

"Oh, nonsense! Cover it. You will be sure to win in the end."

"I have not a dollar left," breathed Harcourt, who was fast coming to his senses.

"Pity! But better luck next time," said the successful sharper, as he swept the money off the table and put it in his pocket. He, too, had begun by staking one dollar; and, though he lost up to a certain point, as he had intended to lose, for a snare, he had ended by winning back all his own money, and more than two thousand besides.

"Take a glass of wine," he said. And he filled two glasses with what was left in the bottle.

It was at this moment that Hanson quietly arose and stole from the office to retire to his bedroom. He had seen the end of the game.

"Drink, man! Drink!" said Yelverton, lifting one of the full glasses and handling it to the stunned, half-dying youth.

Harcourt seized the glass and empted it at a draught.

"Good-night!" said Yelverton, rising.

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"No! no! Don't go yet! For pity's sake, don't go yet!" cried Harcourt, starting up to stop him.

Yelverton sat down quietly and looked at the excited speaker.

"I have been mad! mad! blind! criminal! dishonest!"

Yelverton looked at the frantic youth with inquiring eyes and raised brows.

"That money you last won from me was not mine to stake! It was—it was——"

"My young friend," quietly began the sharper, "I am not curious to know how that money came into your possession. It was in your possession, and I have won it."

"Oh, Mr. Yelverton, I beg, I pray you to give me back that money! It belonged to a guest in this house. For Heaven's sake, give it back to me, or I am ruined! ruined! ruined!" wildly exclaimed the youth.

"Don't excite yourself, my boy. You are a novice in these matters yet. When you get used to these little ups and downs of fortune, you will not mind them. Why, you may be 'ruined' and restored half a million of times in the course of your life if you follow this profession," said the gambler, philosophically.

"Oh! Oh! Hear me, Mr. Yelverton! If you will not give me back that money, lend it to me! I will give you my note for it, with interest, and work day and night, and give up my college course, to pay you!" pleaded Harcourt, clasping his hands and lifting his eyes, praying to this demon as he would have prayed to the Lord.

"Could not think of it, my dear boy."

"Oh! what shall I say to Cutts when I meet him tomorrow?" groaned poor Will.

"Tell him your pocket was picked. Tell him the safe was robbed. Tell him any bosh you like, if the money really was his."

"It was his indeed! Oh, you would not see me utterly, shamefully ruined!" cried the wretched boy, seizing the sharper's hand and clinging to it.

"What rot! If you can't work yourself out of this scrape, you are too good for this world. Too good to

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be at large. There! Good-night!" exclaimed Yelverton, and he laughingly shook off his supplicant and left the office.

"Mr. Yelverton!" cried the youth, rushing after him.

"Don't bother me! It is late. I was up nearly all last night, and I am dead for sleep," said the man, with an audible yawn, as he went slowly up the stairs, looking as he said.

CHAPTER IV

THE GAMESTER'S DUPE

Harcourt returned to the office and dropped into his chair, buried his face in his hands, and bowed his head upon the fatal table on which he had staked and lost another man's money.

He was sobered now, but scarcely sane. He felt that he had been ensnared to his destruction. He knew that he had been tempted to play, tempted to drink, and cheated at cards by an accomplished sharper, and his anger burned so fiercely against his destroyer that it consumed all consciousness of his own share in the evil-doing.

It was all that consummate villain's work. He had schemed to win that money from the time he saw it given in trust! It was as bad as if the gamester had stolen it! It was worse than if he had stolen it! It was not only theft of money, which was base and wicked enough itself, but it was the betrayal and ruin of a young man—"the only son of his mother, and she a widow."

For what had he been lured to do? What would the law call the loss of that money? Something that would send him to the State prison!

"Oh, my dear mother! Oh, Roma!" he groaned, with an almost bursting heart.

Roma, he thought, would despise him with infinite, inexpressible scorn, and despise herself for having ever noticed him—a thief!—a convict!

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And his poor mother—a woman indeed "of sorrows and acquainted with grief"—would die of this last and worst of woes!

"Oh!" he said, "if I had only died of the fever, like my sisters, or been killed in battle, like my father and brothers! If I had only died! If I could die now! Why can I not die at once, right here, of this intolerable shame and despair that weigh me to the dust?"

Then a mad impulse inspired him—to destroy himself!

It would be so easy! He could go out as if for a bath—as was his custom very early in the morning before the guests were up—undress and leave his clothes upon the rocks and drop from them into the sea.

It would be supposed that he had been seized with cramps while in the water—which was cold at this season, and especially in the early hours of the day—and that he had been drowned while bathing. This would be so much better than to live to be tried, convicted and sent to the State prison.

And for his poor mother, sorrow for her drowned boy would be so much easier to bear than shame and anguish over the living convict.

And Roma would mourn the young lover, instead of scorning the convicted felon.

Yes—he would die and end it all. Yes, that would be best for everybody, he thought. He, who but three short hours before had been so full of joyous life and hopeful energy and proud anticipations, must now die by his own hand—must leave the sunlit earth and go down into the world of darkness. This was to be the end of Dorothy Harcourt's son, of Roma Fronde's lover. This must be the end of all his young ambition!

And that black fiend, Yelverton, the cause! That blackest fiend from the deepest abyss of hell, who had lured him on little by little to play, to drink, and drink again, and play again, until he had ensnared him and completed his ruin! And just for the sake of cheating him out of the money which was not his own.

Yes, he must die, that his shame might die with him.

No one would ever know of his temptation and fall.

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The money would be missed, of course, and the hotel would be responsible for its loss to the guest who held the receipt; but no one would suspect him; no one would know how it went, except Yelverton, and he would keep the secret for his own sake; and he, the deep, dark, deadly villain, would be the gainer by the death of one and the anguish and despair of others, all brought about by his own villainy.

What diabolical injustice was here! Why should Yelverton keep that money? It was not his own. He had cheated his victim out of it, and it was not even his victim's money to lose!

It was Charles Cutts' money, when it was staked, and it was Charles Cutts' money still, now that it had been dishonestly won! It was Charles Cutts' money in the pocket of the sharper and swindler, Nathan Yelverton!

Why should it remain there? He had no right to it! He should be made to give it up! But who could make him?

No one, indeed, he was sure.

Oh! if he could only get that money once more into his possession, he would profit by the terrible lesson he had learned and never, never touch a card or taste wine again.

Could he but go, even now, to the room of the sharper, tell him of the widowed mother, the waiting betrothed, who would both be overwhelmed with shame and despair at his fall—would the swindler relent?

Ah, no! Harcourt was sure that he never would.

What could be done? Could anything be done?

Suddenly a thought struck him. He might possibly recover the money. Yelverton had no right to it. It was Cutts' money, and the gamester had won it by fraud! It ought to be recovered from the swindler and restored to the owner.

He reflected for a moment, and then resolved that he would dare all, and risk all, to get back that stolen money and give it to Cutts.

He glanced at the clock. It was nearly 2 A. M.

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He opened the office door and looked out.

There was no one up but the watchman at the other end of the hall, and he was in his chair, snoring like a trombone.

He went behind the counter, took his pass key and a pair of pincers, and then put out the lights in the office, closed and locked the door, and stepped silently along the hallway and up the main stairs to the upper hall. Then he opened a side door on the left, leading into the eastern annex, and went softly down a long passage, between two rows of bedroom doors.

A very dim light, in a sconce against the wall, was burning at one end of the passage.

He turned from that light and walked up to the other end, and stood silent and breathless before the southeast corner room. It was numbered 25.

It was a perilous venture that he was on. Something much worse than embezzlement.

He took the pair of nippers, inserted them into the keyhole and turned the key around, in a line with the hole, so that he could push it out. But to push it out might make a noise and awaken the sleeper. He paused and listened.

The sleeper was snoring, not loudly, but deeply, indicating profound slumber.

He pushed the key out, and it fell with a slight jingle. He listened again. There was no sound but the deep snoring of the man within.

He inserted his pass key in the lock, turned it, softly opened the door and entered the room.

The moon was shining full through the end or east window, and flooding the room with a soft radiance. By its light he saw Yelverton lying with his face to the wall, in a deep sleep.

Protruding from under the pillow he saw the corner of dark pantaloons, and there in the pockets he felt sure the money was hidden. He drew them softly, without disturbing the heavy sleeper, took them to the east window, into which the full moon was shining, searched and found the roll of bank notes carelessly thrust into the pocket.

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With intense and breathless interest he counted out the part of the money belonging to Cutts, and crammed the notes into his breast pocket.

He replaced the remainder, and went to lay the garments on a chair near the bed. He did not dare to try to replace them under the bolster lest he should awaken the sleeper. He had accomplished his perilous feat, and was about to leave the room, when a slight rustle caused him to look back.

Horror!

There was Yelverton, sitting up in bed, leveling a pistol at the head of the intruder.

With a spring quick as lightning, Harcourt dashed upon the armed man and seized and turned his hand. The pistol went off, and Yelverton fell dead, with his brains blown out.

Harcourt was stupefied for an instant. It was an accident, as he afterward insisted, yet he knew what the awful consequences of that accident would be to himself under the circumstances.

Only one instant he paused, horrified at what had happened, and then the swift instinct of self-preservation took full possession of him and overmastered every other emotion.

He sprang to the door, took out his pass key, and put it in his pocket, picked up the room key from the floor, closed and locked the door with it and left it in its keyhole on the inside.

Then he sprang to the south window opening on the balcony, slipped through it and closed the shutters, which fastened with a spring.

All this was the work of only two or three minutes, so that he made his escape from the room and fastened it up as if it had been secured from within, before the hotel people, who had been roused by the report of the pistol and came hurrying along the passage, had reached the door.

He climbed over the railings of the balcony and let himself down to the ground by one of the poles.

He knew of an obscure window in the rear of the house by which he could re-enter unperceived. He

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found it and went in and up the back stairs to the hall, which was deserted even by the watchman. Everybody had hurried to the quarter whence the report of the pistol had been heard.

He ran up the main stairs and into the east passage and joined the crowd.

He was pale, trembling, excited; but, then, so, more or less, was everybody else.

There had been some uncertainty in regard to the room in which the pistol had been fired; but by the time he joined them they had found it, and not having received any response to their loud knocking and calling, they had broken it open.

They found the gamester dead in his bed, shot through the head, with the pistol still in his hand, which he had clinched upon it at the instant of death.

This fact, the facts of his watch and jewelry and a large sum of money found in his possession, and the door and windows found secured from the inside, convinced the horror-stricken crowd that Yelverton had died by his own hand.

Will Harcourt heard the general opinion, and breathed a little more freely.

Still, he felt bowed down with shame, remorse and anxiety. If he had not murdered the man, he had certainly caused his death, and he felt that the curse of Cain was upon him.

No one went to bed that night.

The landlord set a watch over the dead body of the gambler until the morning, when the coroner could be summoned from Snowden. The guests sat about in groups, talking of the tragedy.

Harcourt returned to his office. It was now four o'clock in the morning. He took the bank notes from his breast pocket and replaced them in Cutts' wallet and locked the wallet in the safe.

Then he sank into his chair, dropped his face into his hands and bowed his head upon the table, and never moved until broad daylight, when the entrance of Cutts himself aroused him from his stupor of despair.

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"I am going by the first boat, young man. It starts an hour sooner than usual, to fetch the coroner, and I am going. I don't like this place; so, I will trouble you for my money," he said.

Harcourt got up and unlocked the safe, took out the wallet, and passed it to the owner in silence.

Cutts opened it, and counted the money, gave the clerk his receipt and left the office.

Three hours later the coroner came, impaneled the jury, sat upon the case and took all the evidence: The pistol shot that in the dead of night aroused all the people in the hotel; the difficulty of forcing an entrance into the room, which was found in all ways securely fastened on the inside; the money and jewelry found safe; the discharged pistol found clinched in the dead man's hand—oh! it was such a clear case of self-destruction, proved beyond doubt.

In the afternoon of the same day they brought in a verdict of suicide.

The next day, late in the evening, a brother of Yelverton, who had been promptly telegraphed for, arrived to take charge of the body, which, on the following morning, was shipped for Washington City, to be interred in the Congressional Cemetery.

But the disturbed hotel could not return to its normal condition.

The guests began to leave in large numbers, ostensibly because the season was nearly over, really because a "suicide" had spread gloom and horror over the place.

This sudden exodus of so many boarders imposed a great deal of work on the unassisted clerk, in making out their accounts; and in this work he found some little relief in forgetfulness of the worm whose fangs had fastened upon his heart—the worm of remorse—"the worm that never dieth."

It was the evening of the third day from the tragedy that Hanson had entered the office where the clerk was at work, and laid his hand upon him, and shocked him with the awful charge:

"'Thou art the man!'"

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And then had proceeded to say and to prove by his narrative of events, how he had become a secret witness of all that occurred in room 25 on that fatal night.

And finally had required of Harcourt a mysterious service, as the price of his secrecy.

When the miserable youth had begged to know the nature of that service, the blackmailer prepared him for its gravity by saying, cruelly:

"I want you to do something that will so try your spirit, so rack your heart, so madden your brain, that you could never nerve yourself to do it, except to save yourself from a shameful death, your mother from a broken heart and your betrothed from a blighted life."

When the wretched boy then declared that he would be willing to give his body to the flames and his soul to the fiend to save his beloved ones from suffering, Hanson had replied:

"You are too much excited now. I leave you to reflect how much you really are willing to do to save your old mother and fair betrothed from the shame and despair of your trial and execution. Meet me at sunrise to-morrow morning on the Serpent's Back"—or words to that effect.

When the youth had called him back, and begged him at least for some slight indication of the character of the work that would be required of him, the blackmailer had turned and answered:

"A deed without a name."

He left the room without another word.

After Hanson had gone, the young man dropped into his chair, covered his face with his hands and bowed his head upon the table. What was this service—this "deed without a name," that Hanson would exact of him? He could not conjecture. But it did not matter much! Nothing mattered much! But if it should be a crime? Would he deliberately commit a crime to save himself from the consequences of a fault and a fatal accident?

No! no! no! His whole soul repudiated the thought.

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But to save his mother from a broken heart and his betrothed from a blighted life, would he do it?

No! no! no!

But if he should refuse? What then?

His reason reeled.

What was it all about? What was this earthquake that had shaken the foundations of his whole life? And who was he that sat there brooding? He almost lost the sense of his own identity. Could it be possible that he, William Harcourt, the son of Everard and Dorothy Harcourt; the descendant of a long line of high-born, honorable men and pure-minded women; the beloved, the betrothed, of one of the noblest and most beautiful beings that had ever lived and loved; the promised husband of radiant Roma Fronde—was he the wretch that had slipped so suddenly and fallen so deeply into such an abyss of sin and shame? Was he the midnight robber and assassin that he had been called by the blackmailer? The just prey of the gallows, with which he had been threatened? It was incredible! impossible! It must have been somebody else, and he must be in a dream, or in a fever—insane!

He—who never in his short, young life had felt even tempted to falsehood or dishonesty—he could never, by any force of circumstances, have been drawn into the commission of such crimes! Never!

Then the whole tragedy passed before him, and he saw himself, as if he had been another man, in every act of it.

Then suddenly the consciousness that it was himself pierced him like a sword.

He felt as if he were going mad.

He dropped upon his knees, and he prayed as he had never prayed in all his life before. And then a strange thing happened. He suddenly swooned into sleep—the first sleep he had had since the terrible night of Yelverton's death, now four days ago. Ah, better, it would seem, if he had never waked again in this world! Better he had died in that dreamless sleep!

It continued unbroken for several hours.

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When he awoke day was dawning. A vague, shadowy despair darkened his soul.

What was this horror on his life? He awoke from that dreamless sleep as one who rises from the grave to come to judgment. His only consciousness of life was undefinable misery of soul.

Suddenly a flood of recollection overwhelmed him. All that had happened between his last happy sleep and this dreamless trance flowed over him.

He called on the heavenly Father in impassioned prayer—prayer for pardon and redemption, even though that redemption might come through severest, bitterest expiation, so that no suffering should reach his unoffending beloved ones. So praying, still praying, still calling on the Lord of all mercies, although his lips moved not, Harcourt closed up the office, and walked out to keep his tryst with Hanson and to hear his doom.

He was early.

The morning was clear. The sky was red in the east with rays of the coming sun.

The island lay like some monstrous pre-Adamite serpent, heading to the south, but winding in and out, until its tail vanished toward the north.

Harcourt walked along the ridge toward this vanishing point. There was not a living creature in sight, but just as the sun was rising he saw the form of his fate—Hanson—coming toward him.

CHAPTER V

"NIOBE"

"Moses, is it not time for you to go to the station to meet Master Will It is a long ride, you know."

"Yes, old mis'ess; so it is, ma'am. But, see, Ise got two mo' loads o' wood to haul for Mister Wyn'up 'fo' he'll let me offen de day's work, mo' less len' me de

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cart an' 'os to fetch Marse Will. But I'll start right off soon's ebber I get free."

"I am afraid Master William will not wait. I am afraid he will try to walk the distance, and it will be too much for him, unless he is much stronger than when he left us."

"Doane you fear, ole mist'ess. I'll go right off, soon's Ise at lib'ty so to do. An' if so be he doane wait, but do set off to walk home, I'll meet him more'n half-way to de station," said old Moses, as he touched up his horse and drove on in the direction of the "big house," once the home of the Harcourts, but now the property of Mathias Wynthrop, a stranger, from Maine, who had bought the estate and settled his family upon it, and hired the former slaves to work the farm.

They were kind people, and were a large family, consisting of father, mother, five sons and five daughters. All—parents and children—were tall, fair, blue-eyed, strong and active, and bore so great a family likeness to each other that it was hard to tell one grown son from his next brother, or one grown daughter from her next sister.

The parents were between fifty and sixty years of age. The "children"—alternating boy and girl—ranged in years from Silas, who was thirty, down to "little" May, who was fifteen years of age, and five feet five inches tall.

Mr. Wynthrop had bought the estate—half ruined as it was, and sold under the mortgage—for less than a quarter of its real value. He had the money to pay cash down and to restore the farm.

The family had come to the place with the kindliest intentions to all. They had first mended and fitted up the wretched cabins, and had given the negroes good wages for not very good work.

I say "they," because the wife and daughters were as active in the business as were the husband and sons.

They would have been friendly and helpful to "the dethroned queen," as Margaret Wynthrop, the eldest

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daughter, called the late mistress of Lone Lodge; but the proud and sensitive Southern woman, in her humiliation, would have nothing whatever to do with the "usurpers," as she naturally, but most unjustly, called them.

She became something of a hermit, and chose her cell on a spot from which she could not even see the home where she had once lived in prosperity and happiness.

She took up her abode in a log cabin, in a little hollow among the pine hills; and here she lived, reverently and affectionately served and tended by her two former slaves, Moses and his wife, Martha.

The log house was not without its attractions. Its position was picturesque. Pine-covered hills rose all around the little dip of a dell in which it stood, and a clear, little brook ran before the door. Outside the rough bark of the logs toned in well with the dark green foliage of the pine trees. A thick screen of morning-glories, now full of flowers, red, white, blue, purple, of all shades, grew around the two front windows, and over the one door that stood between them. There was no flower garden in front, but back of the little house there was a patch of cabbages and potatoes and some few other vegetables and pot herbs; also a little henhouse and woodshed.

The interior of the cabin was divided into three small rooms, two on one side of the narrow passage and one on the other. This interior was as purely clean as soap, water and whitewash could make it.

The little, low door opened into the narrow passage.

The door on the right side of this let into the larger of the rooms running from front to back, and used as the common living room of Moses and Martha, in which they ate, slept, and in which the woman cooked, washed and ironed.

The large room on the other side had been partitioned off by Moses' skillful hands into two apartments; the front one to be used as Mrs. Harcourt's sitting room and the back as her bedroom. These were both scantily but cleanly fitted up with some of the

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refuse sticks of furniture from the sale of Lone Lodge. In the little front room there was an old sofa bed, newly covered with curtain calico by the deft fingers of Martha; a little black walnut corner cupboard, with glass doors; a little mahogany table, round when the leaves were up and it was set in the middle of the bare floor for a meal, small and narrow when the leaves were down and it was set back against the wall; a cane rocking-chair, with a calico-covered cushion at the back and on the seat; two other plain cane chairs; a little, cheap clock on the wooden mantelpiece, and a pair of old-fashioned brass andirons in the fireplace; a white cotton curtain at the one window.

That was all, or nearly all, the furniture in the sitting room of Dorothy Harcourt, late of Lone Lodge.

The little bedroom in the rear of this was smaller still, having but one square window of four tiny panes, which opened on hinges like a door, just behind the white cot bed that nearly filled up all the space.

The front room, on this twenty-fifth of September, was in holiday trim. A bright, little wood fire was burning in the fireplace; the hearth was as red as paint could make it; the andirons as brilliant as polished gold; the pine floor as white as ivory; the walls white as lime could effect; the window curtain fresh and crisp as Martha's skillful laundering could make it. The round, little table was set in the middle of the floor, and covered with the finest of damask table-cloths—although, certainly, also the thinnest and most darned—adorned with the finest old china, albeit much cracked and skillfully mended, and enriched by delicate cakes and sweetmeats, all the work of Martha's culinary art, for——

"Lord! as long as I has my cow an' my hens, and can get a bit of butter, an' milk, an' eggs, I can knock up cakes as good as need go on any quality's table. An' as for de 'serves, why, ef Mose can manage to buy me a extra poun' or so o' sugar, I can fin' berries enough growing wile in de woods, let alone wot peaches an' fings de neighbors will gimme free for nuffin," she was accustomed to say.

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But only on grand occasions like this was the extravagance of cakes and sweetmeats indulged in.

Only on occasions like this, also, did "the dethroned queen" assume all her regalia; it was not much, indeed, only an old, black satin gown, well repaired, but of such thick, rich goods that it would look well so long as a shred of it remained, and an English thread lace collar and cap.

This simple costume well became the majestic form and face and gracious presence of Dorothy Harcourt.

She had been to the road that skirted outside of the hills north of this little dell to look for Moses, and hurry him up to go and meet the train that was expected to bring the widow's son home to his mother's humble roof.

Now she returned and seated herself in the cushioned chair to wait with what patience she might for the return of the youth.

Martha came in to her.

Martha, the wife of Moses, was a tall, spare, very black woman, who, in contrast to her nightshade complexion, affected a snow-white turban, neck handkerchief and apron which almost completely covered her gown, of some dark stuff. This costume was, of course, only assumed on occasions when her mistress was in regalia. Of Martha's working clothes, the less said the better.

Martha, on entering "the presence," made a deep courtesy and said:

"Everything is ready, ma'am, to put down on de fire soon's de young marster 'ribes. W'en is yer 'spectin' ob him, ma'am?"

"Late this afternoon. His train will reach Logwood at four o'clock. If Moses could manage to meet it, he might be here by six; but——" She paused. She hated to speak the name of her family's successor at Lone Lodge. She went on: "His employer will not let him off before the—before the last fiber of 'the pound of flesh' is exacted."

Martha looked perplexed and meditative.

"Now wot dat Mose been up an' doin' of? Sellin'

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my calf to Misser Wyn'up, fo' de little beas' is ole 'nough? Wot's he been doin' of, ma'am?"

"Moses has done nothing, woman. You don't understand. Why, what is that? Who is that?" she suddenly broke off and exclaimed, as the sound of wheels was heard before the door and a buggy drew up, and a voice shouted:

"House!"

Mrs. Harcourt went to the window.

Martha ran out to the door.

A tall, fair man sat in the buggy. By his side lay another man.

"Come here, my good woman, and hold my horse's head while I get down. You're not afraid of him, are you?"

"'Fraid? Wot yes talkin' 'bout, Mr. Silence? But w'y can't dat yudder ge'man dere hole de hoss for yer?" asked Martha, as she went to the creature's head.

"Because he is not able. He is ill," replied Silas Wynthrop.

"Wot's de matter long of him—oh, Lord! it is Marse Will!" Martha broke off and exclaimed, as soon as she saw who the companion of young Wynthrop was.

Meanwhile Mr. Silas had got out and given his hand to his fellow traveler.

And Dorothy Harcourt, looking through the window, had recognized her son, and hurried from the house to meet him.

"It is very good of you, Mr. Silas Wynthrop, to give my son a seat in your carriage, from the depot, and I thank you very much," said the stately old lady, even before she turned to greet and welcome her beloved boy.

"Don't mention it, ma'am. Glad to be of service to you or him. But I am afraid he is not well," said the young man.

"Not well! Oh, Heaven, no!" exclaimed the mother, as soon as she saw her son. "Will! Oh, Will! What is the matter?"

"Nothing, mother, dear. I will be all right soon,"

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faltered the pallid lips of the youth, who was icy cold, ashen pale and reeling like a drunken man.

"Let me take him into the house, ma'am," said young Wynthrop, who still supported the sinking form of Will Harcourt.

"Do, sir. Oh, you are very good. I thank you very much," sincerely exclaimed the widow, forgetting that her benefactor was heir apparent to the "usurper" of her kingdom.

And she went on the other side and gave the support of her aged arm, and so helped to lead her fainting son into the cabin.

They laid him on the sofa bedstead.

His mother knelt down beside him, adjusted the pillow under his head, loosened his collar, and unbuttoned his coat.

"Will, dear Will! What is this, my boy? You are so cold—Ah! and scarcely any pulse," she exclaimed. Then she suddenly started up, hastened to the corner cupboard, and took from it a small bottle of compound spirits of lavender and hartshorn, from which she poured a little into a glass, added some water, and hastened back to the side of the invalid.

"Drink this, my dear boy. It will revive you. You have overworked yourself, that is all—that is all. You will be all right when you have rested at home for a little while."

"Oh, yes, mother, dear, I shall be all right," Will assented, as soon as he had drained the glass she had put to his lips.

"Oh, sir!" said the grateful mother, turning to Silas Wynthrop, who still stood by the sofa. "I feel I can never thank you enough. Surely Providence sent you to the help of my poor boy. How was it you happened to find him? Were you at the station?"

"Oh, no! I had been up at Lakewood to buy some groceries from Plunket's store. The train stopped and passed while I was in the store. I heard it. It was a good half hour after that I started to drive home; and about a mile from the village I overtook Mr. Harcourt —or, rather, came upon him sitting, exhausted, on the

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roadside. I got him into the trap, and brought him home."

"Oh, how I thank you!"

"Pray, don't, for so trifling an act. Can I do anything more for you, ma'am? I wish you would believe that I am at your orders, and would be happy if you would command me."

"You are very kind, but there is nothing more that you can do for us, sir, thank you."

"Then I will bid you good-evening. I will call to-morrow morning to see if I can be of use."

"Thank you, sir."

"Not at all. Good-afternoon, ma'am."

"Good-afternoon, sir."

"Mother, come here, darling," whispered Will, as soon as the visitor had left the house.

She came and knelt down by his sofa.

"It is nothing, dear mother. Do not be anxious. I am not ill or in any pain. I am only very cold and weak. It is nothing!" he said, with an effort of cheerfulness.

"I know it is nothing, my dear boy. Of course it is nothing," she said, though her fears contradicted her words; and she got blankets from her bed and covered him warmly.

Martha came in, followed by Moses.

"To think ob young Marse Will gitting home 'fo' I went to meet him! I was jest on my way, w'en I meet Misser Silence in his buggy; an' he tell me he done fetch young marse home hisse'f, an' drap him right here. Mighty good ob Misser Silence, ef he is a superer"—usurper—said Moses, as he came up to the sofa.

"You hush, ole man. Doane yer see young Marse Will done knock up? Ole mist'ess, ma'am, wot he want is nouris'men' right away. I gwine to put dem two chickens, wot we meant to brile for his supper, into a sasspan, and make him some strong chicken broff right away. I wish it was beef tea; but dere's not a bit o' beef into de house."

"Do get him something as quickly as you can. But

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the chicken broth will take time. Make some strong coffee instantly, and bring it here, with plenty of cream," said her mistress.

Martha hurried out to attend to her commission, and old Mose followed to look after his horse and cart.

"Mother, dear," said Will, as soon as the widow had drawn a low chair and seated herself by his sofa, "mother, when did you hear from Roma?"

"Why, only three days ago. She writes to me two or three times a week. She is so good. You hear from her oftener than I do."

"Oh, yes! She is in Washington now, with Mrs. Elde and the boys. I was to join her there immediately; but I could not go without first coming to see you."

"Oh, my darling, I should not have been jealous! Indeed, I should not! If you had gone to see your sweetheart before coming to see me, it would have been so natural! And then, again, you have so little time! Your college term will begin next week, will it not?"

"Yes, mother, dear; but I am not going back to college."

"Not going back to college! Why, what do you mean, Will?" demanded the old lady.

"I am going to marry Roma Fronde almost immediately," replied the young man, in a strong, hard tone, very unlike that in which it might be supposed that a lover would announce the near approach of the culmination of his happiness.

"Going to marry Roma Fronde, almost immediately!" gasped Dorothy Harcourt, as if his words had taken her breath away. "Why, I thought—I thought that you——" and she stopped for want of wind.

"Oh, yes, dear mother! You thought we were going to wait until I should have graduated from my college, then graduated from the National Law School; then had been called to the bar; then made a splendid hit by winning some great case, and laid the foundation of fame and fortune! Dear mother, life is too short! It would take too many years to accomplish all that!

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We should both be gray and withered! Cold and loveless, perhaps! No, we must marry now, if ever!" he exclaimed, excitedly. And he began to throw off the blankets from his shoulders.

"I am very much delighted to hear it, Will! I always knew, my dear, that it was only your scruples that delayed your marriage! I always knew that dear, devoted girl was willing to take you as you were and trust the future to your faith and talents! And surely, Will, marriage with so noble a woman need not hinder your progress to fame and fortune, but rather help you in your race. When is the happy day to be, Will, my boy?"

"I do not yet know."

"Oh!"

"We will settle that when we meet in Washington," he said, throwing his blankets entirely off.

"Will, my dear, we will talk no more at present. You have a flush on your cheeks, and you have a—well—a shining in your eyes. You are getting feverish, Will!" said the widow, growing uneasy.

"Mother! You heard of that—that—terrible tragedy at the Crest House?" exclaimed the youth, glaring into the face of the widow.

"Yes, dear; but we will not talk of it!"

"They—said it was—a suicide!" he cried, growing more excited.

"Yes, dear, that is often the end of a gambler! But, there, do not talk of it!" said the old lady, uneasily.

"Yes, that was what the people of the hotel said, when they found him dead in his closed room; for it was all fastened up from the inside, mother!" he continued, glaring as if his eyeballs must have burst from their sockets.

"Will, you must not talk of this! I won't hear you! You—you are feverish now."

"And the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of suicide! They could not have done anything else, when they heard all the evidence—of the room being broken open and found all closed up, and the money and jewels all safe, and the pistol clinched in his stiffened

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right hand. They could not have brought in any other verdict than suicide, could they? And that verdict settles the case, don't it? Ring down the curtain! The last act of the tragedy is over!"

"Will! Will! Oh, my dear Will, do not talk so wildly," exclaimed the widow, and she hastened to the corner cupboard, got a towel out of a lower drawer, dipped it in cold water and laid it on his hot head.

"Now, up with the curtain again! Ring up the curtain! It is now the farce that follows the tragedy: What a farce! What a roaring farce! The marriage of Figaro outdone! It will bring down the house!" he cried, sitting up on his sofa.

"Will! My darling, darling Will, lie down," pleaded his distracted mother.

But he no longer even recognized her; he sat staring wildly around the room.

"Martha! oh, Martha! come in here and help me, for Heaven's sake!" cried the terrified woman.

The servant came running into the room.

"For de Lord's sake, wot is it, old mis'ess, ma'am?"

"Help me," exclaimed the old lady.

But the sort of help she called for was not needed then. The form of the young man suddenly relaxed, his eyes closed, and he fell back upon the sofa in a swoon that sunk into a stupor.

"Where is Moses? Oh, send him for a doctor—Dr. Wall, at Logwood," cried the frantic mother, wringing her hands.

"I go start him right off. He jes' came in from puttin' up de hoss an' cart. Don't you be scared, old mist'ess, ma'am. It is on'y a berry bad ager 'n fever wot he's got. He was mighty cold w'en he got in, didn't you notice?"

"Oh, don't stop to talk, woman! Hurry out and send your husband for the doctor!" urged the terrified mother.

And her servant ran out to do her bidding.

Dorothy Harcourt sat by the side of her son, unable

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to do anything for him but to renew the cold application to his burning head until the return of Martha.

Then the mistress and maid undressed the sufferer and put him to bed on the cot in the inner room.

Dorothy Harcourt took her place beside his bed, still often changing the cold, wet bandages on his head, and praying for him all the time with all her mother's heart.

At eleven o'clock that night Moses returned from his mission without the doctor. The latter was in attendance on a sick lady whom he could not leave. But he would come early in the morning.

All that night the patient lay alternating between stupor and delirium. Early in the morning Dr. Wall, an old friend of the Harcourts, appeared at the log cabin.

As soon as he had examined his patient he pronounced his case one of brain fever.

Ah, yes! mind and body, overtasked, had given way beneath the burden of life and sunk to the very verge of death.

For many days and nights, as his fever rose or fell, he lay alternating between wild delirium and profound stupor.

Only once, in the early part of his illness, did he allude to the mysterious compact made with the blackmailer, and then he spoke in terms unintelligible to his watchers:

"'A deed without a name!' Yes, truly, it will be 'a deed without a name.' Oh, villain! villain! an accursed 'deed without a name!'"

This was thought to be only the wild, meaningless talk of the brain-sick man, and made no serious impression on the hearers.

And after this, strange to tell, in his wildest wanderings he never spoke of his life at the fatal Isle of Storms. All the tragic story of his fate seemed mercifully obliterated. In delirium he lived over again his earlier days. He babbled of his boyhood, his playmates, his schooldays, his classfellows, his holidays, sports and games. In dreams he played football, base-

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ball and tennis, and he laughed and shouted with his companions and hurrahed for every victorious hit.

His despairing mother never left his side day or night, except upon urgent necessity, and then only for a few minutes.

Martha was her devoted assistant.

Moses gave up his place in the service of Mr. Wynthrop and stayed at the log cabin to be ready to run anywhere for anything that might be wanted.

Dr. Wall rode over every day from Logwood, though the distance was nearly seven miles.

The family at Lone Lodge were sympathetic and serviceable.

Mrs. Wynthrop offered to come and relieve the devoted mother of her constant watch.

But Dorothy Harcourt, while thankfully acknowledging the kindness, would let no one take her place, no, nor any duty interfere with her devotion to her only son.

Moses brought letters from the post office at Logwood regularly. They were always from Roma Fronde, who was now Mrs. Harcourt's only correspondent. But the absorbed mother never even cared to open them, and never thought of answering them. There was now nothing and nobody in this world of any consequence at all except that failing, perhaps dying, son.

"Oh!" she said, one day, when Mrs. Wynthrop had come over the hills to inquire—"oh, if our Lord were only now on earth, how I would go to Him, and clasp His feet and beg Him to raise my son, my only son, as He raised the dead son of the widow, even from his bier!"

Mrs. Wynthrop, a tall, fair, fresh woman with a rosy face and with white hair, although she was but little over fifty years of age, looked compassionately on the despairing mother, and said:

"Dear friend, your vigils and your anxiety have unhinged your mind, or you would know that He is on earth as well as in heaven. Did He not say to His children: 'Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the world'? Did He not tell us that 'not a sparrow

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falls to the ground without our Father'? He is here, dear friend, as truly as He was beside the bed of Jairus' daughter. He will do the very best that can be done for you and for your son—the very best—yes, even without your asking Him. Yet it is good to pray and then to leave all in His merciful hands."

"But I cannot pray that way," wailed the woman. "I cannot say: 'Thy will be done.' I can only pray that He will raise my son. Oh, Lord, raise my son now, let whatever come to either of us in the future! I have only him—only him!"

Mrs. Wynthrop thought that was a fearful responsibility for any human being to take—a fearful prayer for anyone to make for her beloved. But she did not say so, for she looked upon this distracted mother as somewhat crazed by grief and anxiety and long, fatiguing vigils.

She sent pure wines for the patient and his nurse, and highly concentrated food, prepared by her own hands; lamp shades to temper the light at night, an adjustable reclining chair for the aged watcher by the sick bed, and every little comfort and convenience that she saw was wanting in the poor log house. Nor were any of these kindnesses rejected or ungratefully received, though the mother's whole heart and mind was so absorbed in thoughts and cares for her son that she had scarcely any room for a true appreciation of her neighbor's good will and good deeds.

Later she felt it all, and felt some compunction for her long antipathy to "the usurpers."

But the sharp trial drew to a close. The good constitution of the young man, the medical skill of his doctor, and the careful nursing of his mother, got the control at length of his terrible malady.

One morning, about the first of October, just as the sun was rising over the hills, Mrs. Harcourt got up and went to turn down the light of the lamp and open the little window to admit the light of day.

Just as the first golden gleams pierced the darkness she heard a sweet, low note:

"Mother!"

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It was the first intelligent word he had spoken for many days.

"Oh, thank the Lord!" she murmured, and hastened to the bedside, stooped, and looked at the pale, sunken face and the dark, cavernous eyes seeking hers, and murmured:

"My dear boy! My dear boy!"

"Mother," he said again, in a very sweet, low, faint tone—"Mother, I am going to Washington to marry Roma, and you must go with me."

"That I will, my dear boy," she said, though she thought his mind was still a little wandering. But he did not hear her answer. He had relapsed into unconsciousness.

This was the beginning of the good end.

When the doctor paid his daily visit that morning, he said the danger was past.

Then the widow's heart "sang for joy."

After this his fever began to subside; his lucid intervals were frequent; but in every one of them he held to his purpose to go to Washington to marry Roma, and to take his mother with him.

And when he was well enough to sit up in the reclining chair, his first wish was to see Roma's letters that had been received during his illness.

But, though his health had returned, his cheerfulness had not. A profound melancholy overshadowed his life.

CHAPTER VI

ROMA AND HER FRIENDS.

"'The battle!' That, mesdames, must mean the whole play from beginning to end. 'The alarm!' That, of course, is the baby's shrill cry of terror and despair on first being brought to life on the planet Earth. The 'struggle!' That means running for Congress, or what not. The 'relief!' Ah, well, we know what that means,

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and the weariest of us are not overwilling to get it. We may raise a terrible hullabaloo on coming into the world, but we are all of us very loath to leave it."

The reader and speaker was the Hon. Joel Gray, Representative in Congress from a district in the northwestern part of Maryland.

His audience consisted of two ladies—Mrs. Ruth Elde and Miss Roma Fronde. The scene of his discourse was a private parlor on the second floor of a West End hotel in Washington.

"Now, won't you read on, please, without comment?" inquired the gay widow.

"I have finished the poem, ma'am. And now I must away to the scene of conflict, and engage my adversary single-handed. Otherwise I have got to go up to the state department, see the secretary, and find out, if I can without offense, why certain promises have not been fulfilled," returned the honorable member from Maryland.

"They are thinking of sending you out as consul to Delfcome, are they not?" inquired Ruth Elde.

"Yes, that is just where it is! 'Thinking' about it! I wish they would do something else besides think. But how did you hear of it, if I may venture to ask the question?"

"Oh, I heard the gentlemen speaking of it in the ladies' parlor."

"Oh! thank you! Well, good-morning. I will look in this evening, if you will permit me."

"Certainly; but if you do, you will have to escort us to the National, to see Ristori in 'Queen Elizabeth,' for we have the proscenium box," said the widow.

"All right. Thanks for the honor. I shall be punctual," replied the "member," and with a bow that included both ladies he went away.

Mrs. Elde and Miss Fronde, returning from their Northern tour, had taken Washington en route for the purpose of spending a few days to see the great Italian queen of tragedy in all her rôles.

Mrs. Elde had sent her hopeful boys, Abbot and Rudolph, home to Goblin Hall, in charge of the new

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tutor she had engaged to begin to prepare them for their respective high future destinies as President of the United States and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Their country neighbor, Mr. Gray, was also in town, looking after his interests in the Delfcome consulship. And it was an open secret that the black-eyed, rosy-cheeked, curly-haired widow was "engaged" to marry that tall, spare, pale-faced, gray-bearded widower, the Honorable Joel. Indeed, people who knew much more about the matter than the engaged couple knew about themselves, did not hesitate to say that Mr. Gray and Mrs. Elde were to be married right away, and he was to take her with him when he should go to Europe as consul at Delfcome.

At all events, it was very certain that the Honorable Joel spent many hours of every morning in Mrs. Elde's parlor, talking sentiment or reading poetry to the sprightly little widow and her stately young niece; and that every evening he was to be seen in her box at the theater, and every Sunday in her pew at church.

After he had left the two women alone together, on the morning on which we have again introduced them to our readers, Roma Fronde laid down her work—a square of harlequin patches she was piecing to contribute to Mrs. Elde's crazy quilt—and said, with a weary sigh:

"It is strange we do not hear from Will Harcourt."

"When did you hear last?" inquired the widow, trying to fit a triangular bit of orange-colored satin to an oblong strip of crimson damasse velvet on her own square of crazy quilt.

"It has been four weeks since. He wrote on the day the hotel on the Isle of Storms was closed. He said he was going to Lone Lodge Land to see his mother, and should try to persuade her to come with him to Washington. That is the last I have heard of either of them. Of course, I wrote immediately to Mrs. Harcourt, and begged her to come and see us here and be our guest, although we were living at a hotel, and I added that Washington at this season was never full,

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and that she could have a choice of fine rooms at this house. But, my dear auntie, I have received no answer to that letter, nor to any other one that I have written since. It is now four weeks since I wrote that letter of invitation, and it is more than that since received any news of Will Harcourt."

"Then, my dear, he must be ill—and no wonder."

"I fear that is but too likely, auntie. And now I think of it, his last letter was written in such faint and straggling characters, and in such vague, almost incoherent terms, that what I then supposed to be the mere signs of haste in a busy man might have been symptoms of illness in an overworked one."

"That's it! That's just it, Roma, my dear. He has been killing himself for the last two years. And why he should do it passes the comprehension of a practical woman like me, when I reflect that he and you are engaged to be married, and you are rolling in riches. Why, your income for one month would keep him in the most comfortable quarters in college for one year."

Roma blushed deeply as she answered, lowly:

"I know it, auntie; but I could not dare to offer pecuniary assistance to Mr. Harcourt, or even to his aged mother in her need. To do so would be to offer them an unpardonable insult."

"Well, but you could marry him, and then what is yours could be his, also. And he could go on with his study of law all the same as if he were not married. You are engaged; now, why can't you marry?"

"Because, auntie, I can no more offer Mr. Harcourt my hand than I could offer him money. Only reigning queens are privileged—indeed, are required to take such initiatives; and even they must find it embarrassing, I think."

"But he did propose. And you accepted him and became engaged to him. Now, then, that being so, why can't you marry him?"

"Because, auntie, he has not yet asked me to fix the day. Can't you see how it is, auntie, dear?"

"No, I can't see anything of the sort.

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" 'Optics keen
It takes, I ween,
To see such things
As can't be seen.
And as for me,
I ne'er could see
What dif'rence be
'Twix' tweeedle-dum
And tweedle-dee,' "

chirped the widow.

"And now I tell you, Roma Fronde, if you are going to wait until that young law student comes to be attorney-general, you'll be gray and he'll be bald. And what will be the use of getting married then? And more I tell you—he'll not live to see it. If you don't marry him very soon, you'll have a wreck instead of a man for a husband when you do wed him."

"Auntie, you distress me. How can I help it?"

"Would you fix the day now if he were to ask you?"

"Of course I should."

"All right," exclaimed the widow.

"Auntie, if you do or say anything unwomanly to compromise your own dignity or mine, I shall be very much offended."

"Oh, dignity be hanged! Don't you be afraid. But, Roma, I have been talking in young Harcourt's interests all this time; now I will say a word in yours. Since you have refused some of the most distinguished men in the country for the sake of this dark-eyed boy, and since you are resolved to marry no one else, it is for your good, as well as for his, that you should marry him at once," said the widow, so solemnly that Roma looked up inquiringly.

"I mean this: What are you going to do when Mr. Gray and myself pair off?"

"Oh, auntie! Is it really possible that you are going to have him?"

"Why not, my dear? My boys want a father. His girls want a mother. We like each other very much. The girls and boys like each other, too. It will be a

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very good match both ways. But what are you going to do?"

"Oh, Aunt Ruth! and you have had two husbands already!"

"But they died, one after the other. I was very sorry for both—you know I was. But all the crying in the world wouldn't bring either of them back. And—I have a loving heart and I can't help loving. 'An' that's a sollum trufe, for a fac',' as Pompous Pirate would say. But what are you going to do?"

"When is the wedding to come off, auntie?"

"Oh, it won't be much of a wedding. If he loses the appointment he expects, we won't be married before Christmas, for there'll be no need of hurry; but if he gets it, and has to go abroad immediately, we will be married quietly at once and go out together. Now, if you would consent to go with us——"

"That I could never do, auntie."

"Or if he should not get the appointment, and you would be willing to make your home with us at Wheatfields, when we marry——"

"No, auntie, dear, no! Much obliged, but I could never live in anybody else's house."

"Then, unless you marry young Harcourt, what are you going to do?" You could not live at Goblin Hall alone."

"Yes, I could, auntie; with the old servants. I could, but I will not this year. I have a longing to live on the Isle of Storms. I shall live there this autumn and winter. It will be arctic weather there, of course; but I am strong and robust, and I shall like it. I shall take Pompous and a few more of the old servants with me, and shall enjoy the novelty of the situation, I feel sure."

"I never did hear of such a thing in all the days of my life! I will never consent to that, Roma, never!"

"Dear auntie, I am of age. No one's consent is necessary."

"That of the proprietor of the hotel is, I fancy."

It was growing to be almost a quarrel between the two women.

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"There is no longer any proprietor but myself, the owner of the island. I have already instructed my attorney to refuse to renew the lease to Mr. Todd, and to warn him to vacate the premises within a month. I give him the month over his term of lease to enable him to move his effects at leisure."

"And you would go to an empty, unfurnished house?"

"Oh, no; the central building was let completely furnished, and that furniture will remain there. My attorney will send an agent down to look after my interests."

"Well, you had better take Will Harcourt along with you. He knows the place better than you do, having spent the last season there."

"I do not know it at all, except from his sketches and descriptions; but I am sure I should like it, and like to have him with me. But you see, auntie, as I said before, he has not asked me to fix the day, and—I cannot ask him!" said Roma, with a laugh.

A waiter entered and laid a card upon the table before Mrs. Elde.

"Mr. Hanson!" she exclaimed, reading the card. "Show the gentleman up."

The waiter withdrew, but soon returned and ushered in the debonair and elegant dude of the Crest House.

Both ladies arose to receive him.

"Mr. Hanson! This is an unexpected pleasure!" exclaimed Mrs. Elde, cordially offering her hand.

"A long-anticipated delight to me, dear madam!" replied the exquisite, bowing over the fingers he daintily touched.

Then he turned to Miss Fronde, who received him politely and said:

"I hope you left your sister well?"

"Thanks; quite well. I have just brought her and my mother from the Hot Springs, Arkansas," replied Hanson, as he sank into a chair, when the ladies had resumed their seats.

"You have been quite a bird of passage this summer. The last we heard of you was from the Crest House, on

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the Isle of Storms. Mr. Harcourt, in his letters, mentioned you as one of the guests," said Mrs. Elde.

"Yes, one of the latest guests. I was there with my yacht the last two weeks of the season, and remained until the close of the house," said Hanson, caressing his mustache daintily with the tips of his slender fingers.

"You were there at the time of that terrible tragedy?" said Mrs. Elde, with a shudder.

"The suicide of Yelverton, you mean?" coolly remarked Hanson. "Oh, yes, I was there."

"It was a suicide, I suppose?"

"Oh, undoubtedly! The man was found dead in a room so securely fastened from within that it took much force to break it open. The discharged pistol was found clinched in his stiffened hand, and his money and jewels intact."

"What could have induced the man to do such a deed?"

"Ah! who can tell?"

"What a horrible thing it was!" exclaimed Mrs. Elde.

"The suicide? Oh, a daily occurrence. You cannot open a paper without finding one or more; and not infrequently among men of Yelverton's character."

"The occurrence must have had a dampening effect on the pleasure seekers of that popular summer resort," continued Mrs. Elde.

"There was a stampede, ma'am! In a week after the event there was not a guest left in the house except myself; and not another man except Todd, the proprietor, young Harcourt, the clerk, and one waiter; and not a woman in the house. I stayed until the closing up of the premises. Then set sail for New Orleans and up the Mississippi; left my yacht at Vicksburg, and went by rail to join my mother and sister at the Hot Springs, Arkansas."

"You found it pleasant there?"

"Oh, yes; but I did not stay long. I brought the two ladies by rail back to Vicksburg, and by sea on to the city here. We only arrived last night."

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"Then Rebecca is in Washington. I am delighted to hear it," said Miss Fronde.

"Oh, yes; she insisted that we should come here before going North, so that she could see you."

"I shall call on her to-day. Oh, I do wonder if she would join me in an Arctic expedition this winter, just for a change."

"'An Arctic expedition!'" repeated the visitor.

"To the Isle of Storms, to spend the autumn, and perhaps the winter, in that place," said Roma, in explanation.

"Why, you do not really contemplate such a move, Miss Fronde?" he said.

"Indeed, I do. Why not? My mother's forefathers lived there for ages, summer and winter. I am a hardy creature, and should enjoy living there in winter and in solitude,

"'With one fair spirit for my minister.'

meaning your sweet sister Rebecca," said Roma, gayly.

"And not the brother, on any terms?"

"Not the brother, nor the father, nor the cousin—of the male sex—nor any other gentleman. I intend to be like the fairy princess on her 'Island of Calm Delights,' companioned only by lovely ladies."

"I do not think you will find the Frozen Serpent in winter and in storm very suggestive of calm delights. But I dare say the novelty of the life might have its attractions," said Hanson, as he arose to take his leave.

"I know it will be enjoyable!" exclaimed Roma.

"My sister sent all manner of affectionate messages to you, Miss Fronde, which I have omitted until this instant to deliver. Shall I tell her that you will call to-day?" inquired Hanson, playing idly with his hat.

"Yes, with my love," replied Roma.

And the visitor bowed his adieux and left the room.

As he went downstairs he saw a slight, dark young man in conversation with the porter at the door of the 'Ladies' Entrance."

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"Is Mrs. Elde here, do you know?" questioned the stranger.

"I don't know, sir. She is stopping here; but I don't know as she's in. I'll inquire, sir. What name, sir?"

"You can take up my card," said the stranger, drawing a blank and a pencil from his pocket, writing his name, and handing it to the porter.

"Step in here, sir," said the latter, opening the door of a small reception room on the right, and admitting the visitor.

The porter passed Hanson on the stairs, and went up. Hanson came down, but did not go out. He had recognized the stranger.

He turned to the right and entered the little waiting room.

The stranger was standing at the window, looking out upon the square and watching the golden showers of autumn leaves that fell with every blast of wind that was rising.

"Ah, Harcourt! Glad to see you!" exclaimed Hanson.

The visitor started violently, and turned around, showing a face ghastly in its pallor and emaciation, yet still strangely beautiful with the deadly beauty of the cavernous, dark eyes.

"How long have you been here?" abruptly inquired Mr. Hanson, seeing that the other did not speak.

"I have just come," faltered Harcourt.

"I do not mean in the house; I mean in the city."

"Not an hour yet. I have just arrived."

"Then I think you have been a laggard. It is full five weeks since I received your pledge to do my work," said Hanson, significantly.

"I have been ill—almost unto death. I would it had been quite to death!" sighed the young man.

"Rubbish! And now, have you come to set about performing your part of our compact?"

"Yes, you fiend from the pit, I have!" cried Harcourt.

"Come, come, no bad names. What I require you to

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do is no felony. Not like burglary, you know, or murder!"

Harcourt shuddered, but made no comment.

"Why, it is not even unlawful!" said Hanson coolly.

"'Not unlawful!' No, you devil! Because the law never contemplated the possibility of such a deed! Man never dreamed of the deep damnation of such a deed! A 'deed without a name' in any human or in any devil's tongue!" muttered Harcourt, in hoarse, fiery tones.

"The ladies are in, and will see you, sir," said the porter, entering and interrupting the conversation. "Will you walk up?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE MEETING.

"Up this way, sir," repeated the hotel porter, at the head of the main stairs, as he turned to the right and went up three more steps to another passage, where he opened a door, and, with a very polite bow, ushered Mr. Harcourt into the presence of Mrs. Elde and Miss Fronde.

Roma arose and came to meet him, gave him her hand, and said:

"I am so glad to see you at last!"

"So am I. But you are looking dreadfully ill. Sit down here," added Mrs. Elde, taking his hand and pushing him into the easiest armchair.

"You are very kind. Thank you. Yes, I have been ill, but have recovered now. I am pleased to find you both looking so well," said Harcourt, with a smile that was sadder than a sigh.

"Ah! you have worked too hard. But that must end now. I believe in work, but not in slavery. You must rest for a good while now," said Roma, seating herself near him.

"That horrid murder, or suicide, or whatever it was.

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at the Crest House, was enough to have knocked you up, in your state of health," added Mrs. Elde.

"Do not let us talk of that, auntie," Roma said. And then turning to Harcourt, she inquired:

"How is your dear mother? I hope she is well. Did you bring her to Washington with you?"

"No; she is not here. At the last moment she felt unequal to the journey," replied the young man.

"Ah, no doubt the fatigue and anxiety of nursing you through your long illness was too severe for a woman of her age," remarked Mrs. Elde.

"Yes, I fear that was the cause of my dear mother's breakdown."

"We must hope that she will rally soon and join you here," said Roma.

"I earnestly hope so," added Harcourt; and then turning to Mrs. Elde, he inquired: "My young pupils, madam? They are well?"

"Oh, yes, they are very well. We have got a tutor for them, but he is no more like you, Mr. Harcourt, than a Celestial is like a Bohemian. No offense! I meant to say, than a Chinaman is like a student. He is a roundheaded, light-haired, baby-faced, little undergraduate of a theological institution, and the boys make fun of him, and laugh at him, and neglect their books. They have no ambition, those aggravating boys of mine!"

"Are they here with you?"

"Oh, dear, no! On our arrival in Washington from Atlantic City, our last sojourning place, I packed the scamps, under care of their tutor, down to Goblin Hall, and they are there. Abbot goes in for pigeons, and Rudolph for ferns; neither for studies. I fear they will be a disappointment to me."

"I hope not. They seemed to be very good and intelligent lads."

"Oh, yes! 'good and intelligent.' That is about what their teacher says of them. Mr. Toomie—that is his lovely name—Timothy Toomie. And the chaps refer to him—behind his back—as Timmie Toomie. Now, how

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can boys have any awe of a teacher named Timmie Toomie?"

As no one felt authorized to answer Mrs. Elde's question, she went on to other matters, and inquired if it were not almost luncheon time.

Whereupon Miss Fronde touched the bell, which speedily brought a waiter to the room.

"Give your orders, please," said Roma, in a low tone, and the elder lady took a tablet from the waiter's hand, and filed it up without regard to expense, or—digestion.

Harcourt arose to say good-morning; but both ladies objected so strongly to his departure that he accepted their invitation to luncheon without more ado.

"And, besides, I wish you to go with me to call on Reba Bushe, who has just come with her party from the Arkansas Hot Springs, and stops here for a few days on her way to New York," added Roma.

"I will go with you anywhere with pleasure, of course," replied the young man; but there was no pleasure in his tone.

"You remember Reba Bushe, do you not? She was a schoolmate of mine, and one of my very dearest girl friends. We were in this city together two winters ago; and the summer before last she visited me, with her stepbrother, at Goblin Hall."

"Certainly; I remember her."

"And her stepbrother, William Hanson?"

"Oh, yes."

"Of course you remember him, for he spent some weeks at the Crest House with you."

"Yes," faltered Harcourt.

"And," added Mrs. Elde, "he was there at the time of that horrid murder or suicide, whichever it was. Hanson agrees with the coroner's jury that it was suicide. But you never can tell! You—never—can—tell! However, if it was murder, it will all come out some day! For, you know, murder will out!"

"Auntie!" said Roma Fronde, imploringly, "please do not talk of that affair! I believe you have got it on the brain!"

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"I believe I have. Well, I won't say anything more about it, but just this: That whether Yelverton killed himself, or was killed by somebody else, his death is no loss to anybody, but a great gain in safety to many a heedless youth."

"Now let him drop. You say you remember Reba Bushe? Do you know her name was never Reba, at all?" inquired Roma of Will Harcourt.

"No? What was it, then?"

"Rosalind. But she was annoyed so much at school by being called Miss Rosebush that she changed her uame to homely Rebecca—that is, changed it as far as she is able to do so, by always signing her name Rebecca, Reba, or R. Bushe, and requiring her correspondents to address her in the same style. I really don't know what the effect would be if anyone were to leave her a legacy or deed her an estate."

"And talking about changing names, did you ever hear about the way our old home, in the woods, among the hills, came to be called Goblin House or Goblin Hall?" chimed in Mrs. Elde.

"No; but I suppose on account of some reputed ghost?" suggested Harcourt.

"Not at all; though that is what I used to think, and never knew any better until I had to look over the old title deeds of the estate on the occasion of Roma's coming of age. There I found the first patent, granting the manor to one Guilliaum Goeberlin—evidently a French or Flemish Roman Catholic of Calvert's company of gentlemen adventurers. In subsequent documents I saw the place referred to as Goberlin Hall, and then—well, you must know that this early settler, Guilliaum Goeberlin, had no son, and but one daughter, Mercedes, and she married one Ferdinand Fronde, a Flemish Roman Catholic; and so the estate passed from the Goeberlins to the Frondes; and the name of the place in later documents got to be spelled Goberlin, and, finally, Goblin Hall. Do you see?"

"Yes; but I am disappointed. I would far rather it had been Goblin Hall, with a ghost," said Harcourt, with a faint smile.

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"Oh, there's a ghost, and a haunted room. Never you doubt it! Where would you find an old colonial dwelling two hundred years of age without its ghost and haunted room?"

The entrance of the waiter to lay the cloth for luncheon interrupted this conversation.

Soon the three sat down to a sumptuous repast, that merited the name of a feast rather than a lunch.

While it was in progress, Mrs. Elde, who, in her character of chaperon, gave all the orders, sent the waiter to find an open carriage for her party.

As soon as lunch was over, the two ladies put on their new fall hats and mantles, and escorted by Will Harcourt, entered their barouche and drove to the hotel where the Bushes made their headquarters.

The ladies were at home, and expecting their visitors. They received in their private parlor. Mrs. Bushe was a typical woman of the world. She was about fifty years old; tall, stout, with a fresh complexion, black eyes and black hair, very slightly silvered, and which she wore dressed in the style of the day, very high on the top of her head, with full puffs in front. Her costume was a rich black silk, heavily beaded, and point lace collar and cuffs.

Reba Bushe was very much like her mother, and being thirty years younger—and that is but twenty years of age—she was a very pretty brunette, with a rich, ripe, peachy complexion, plump, red lips, warm, dark eyes and soft, dark hair, that curled all over her head in short, crisp curls. She wore a crimson silk, trimmed with black lace.

She rushed upon her beloved Roma and gave her a strong embrace and several hearty kisses.

Then she released her, and while Roma received the greetings of Mrs. Bushe, Reba turned and politely welcomed the two other visitors.

They sat down and fell into the mutual gossip of the hour, comparing notes about their summer touring and winter prospects; then into a criticism of Ristori, if that could be called criticism which was unqualified praise. Presently Mrs. Elde inquired:

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"Where is your brother? Are we not to see him this afternoon?"

"I think not. He has gone on his yacht with some gentlemen friends to Mount Vernon—a pilgrimage to our national Mecca. They will remain at anchor somewhere down the river all night, and return to-morrow," said Miss Bushe.

"Oh, how jolly it must be to live on a yacht!—to carry one's house all around the world wherever one likes to go!" exclaimed the widow.

"Like a snail, with his house on his back," suggested Reba.

"Not at all! Snails don't go to sea. Your simile don't hold, Miss Reba. But ah! what a splendid time your brother has! By the way, he is not the least like you. He is such a fair blond—almost an Albino—and you such a brown brunette that you are almost a——"

"Little nigger!" put in Reba.

"Nonsense! I didn't mean that at all! I meant a Castilian or a Creole! But, indeed, I never did see such a contrast between brother and sister as there is between you and him. But then, of course, he is only your half-brother and may resemble his father."

"He is not my half-brother, nor even my stepbrother, although he is called so. He is not the least of kin to papa or mama or myself. He is just papa's stepson—the son of papa's first wife, who was the wealthy widow Hanson, with this only son and heir, when he married her. When she died, she left papa guardian of the youth and trustee of his great estate—and so, of course, Bill lived on with his stepfather, and later, when papa married mamma, who was Miss Vanderboeren, you know, the lad was still a part of the family, and learned to call the wife of his stepfather 'mother.' And when I came along, like a female Isaac, the child of my parents' age, you see, I learned to call him 'brother.' There, that is all there is in it!"

"Well, I thank you for these family details. They are always interesting to me."

"But I wish you to understand, ladies, that William Hanson is just as dear to Mr. Bushe and myself as if

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he were our own son," said Mrs. Bushe, bridling, as if she did not quite like her daughter's confidential revelations.

"Oh, of course," exclaimed Mrs. Elde. "I can quite understand that, believe me."

And it occurred to the astute widow that perhaps Mr. and Mrs. Bushe might not have been averse to the idea of turning this millionaire stepson into a son-in-law, but she never hinted her suspicion even to Roma.

The visitors made rather a long call, during which the two girl friends arranged engagements for nearly every day in the week, during their stay in Washington.

"Won't you come in and dine with us, and afterward escort Roma to the National? I have a box there for the evening. There will be no one but Roma, myself and Mr. Gray. There are two seats, therefore, which will be vacant. I offered them to the Bushes, but they had already engaged front stalls in the parquette. So what do you say to joining our party?" inquired Mrs. Elde.

Harcourt looked at Roma before replying, then seeing the matron's invitation indorsed by the girl's eyes, he frankly accepted and followed the two women into the hotel.

Roma went to her bedroom to change her dress for dinner and for the play.

Mrs. Elde dispensed with that ceremony, just for the purpose of staying in the parlor to have a confidential chat with young Harcourt.

"Well, my boy," she said, dropping into one easy-chair and pushing him into another, "what have you been doing to yourself, I should like to know, to make you look like a corpse, from which the human soul has fled forever, and into which some fiery fiend has entered?"

"Oh, Mrs. Elde!"

"I tell you it is just so! Your face is ashen, death-like, but your eyes glow and burn as if lit by fire from within."

"I have been very ill."

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"What made you ill? Tell me that?

"Severe nervous and mental strain, I think. Yes, I know it was that."

"I don't wonder. You forgot that you were flesh and blood, and you overtasked mind and body. Now all that must be stopped, and you must have rest for a year, at least," said the matron, with a decisive nod.

"Ah! if I could," sighed the youth.

"You can. You must marry your betrothed, and take her to Europe. And that without any delay."

"Oh, if I might! If such happiness were possible to me!" moaned the young man, as a look of anguish convulsed his face.

"'If you might?'" repeated the widow, looking at him in surprise and perplexity. "Why, what hinders you? What is the matter with you? Are you like 'Young Lochinvar's' rival,

"'A laggard in love?'"

demanded the widow, impatiently.

"I have failed in everything, everything, everything!" wailed the youth, in a tone of utter despair.

"You have not failed to win the heart of the noblest girl in the whole world. Come, now, my lad. All this depression of yours is the result of nervous exhaustion from overwork. The remedy is in your own hands. Marry your betrothed, go to Europe with her, and travel a year. You will come back a new creature."

"Oh, if I might! If I might! But, Mrs. Elde, dear friend, I am utterly, utterly unworthy of Roma Fronde. Unworthy to be her lowest servant! How much more unworthy to be her husband!" groaned Harcourt.

Fads!" cried the widow, contemptuously. "She is the best judge of that, I reckon. And you owe it to her to ask her opinion! And as for your being quite worthy of her—of her! Who is so, pray? Why, my good boy, if she waits until she finds a man really worthy of her, Roma Fronde will die a maiden, probably, at a very advanced age. Take her opinion on the question of your worthiness. And then——

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But here she comes. Speak to her of this. She has a right to expect it of you."

Roma Fronde came in, looking radiant and beautiful, wearing a pale blue satin dress, covered with white, blond lace, rows of pearls on lovely neck and arms, and nothing on her head save her own rich, golden hair, in clustering curl and puffs, piled high, and giving a regal aspect to her figure.

"Here you are, Roma, all ready! And now I must go and make a hasty toilet, and meanwhile do you try and exorcise ten legions of blue devils out of our friend!" said Mrs. Elde, starting up, fluttering out of the room, and leaving the lovers alone.

Roma cast a glance at her betrothed, and seeing his deeply troubled countenance, went to him, took his hand, looked in his face, and then sat down beside him, and inquired:

"What is it, Will? What distresses you? Is it anything that I can—can—help?"

"No, dearest, my queen! It is nothing that you can help—nothing."

"But let me hear," she pleaded.

"No, loveliest and most beloved, I cannot tell you the curse that has blasted my life. Roma, I am not even sane now. I know I am not; for I am going to do what I never could dare to do were I in my right mind."

She looked at him in anxiety, but in no alarm. Her fine, strong, calm organization was not easily disturbed. She thought now that his condition was the consequence of his severe illness, just as that illness had been the result of his severe labors and privations, and, in her sympathy, she admired him more than she pitied him.

"Roma, my lady," he continued, "I am going to ask you to forget the difference in our fortunes, and not to make me wait until I shall have equalized them by some splendid success at the bar, which it might take many years to reach. I am going—— Oh, Heaven, what am I going to do?" he broke off, and covered his face with his hands, while his bosom shook convulsively.

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She looked at him and wondered. She had had no experience in mental or bodily illness; but still she ascribed his condition to an imperfect convalescence.

"What is it, Will?" she gently inquired.

"Roma, my queen," he said, dropping his hands and raising his eyes deprecatingly to her face, "I am going to ask you to fulfill our long engagement and to marry me. Yes. I, a beggar, lower than a beggar, a fool and a villain, ask you to marry me as soon as possible. Yes, and I am so much more a villain to ask it; a most accursed villain to ask it!" he groaned.

"Will, this self-slander is all the morbid outcome of your late illness. Pray, try to suppress such words and such thoughts. Dear Will, I am ready to fulfill my promise when you wish," she said, in her calm, cool, soothing voice.

He lifted her hand to his lips and bowed his head upon it.

"Oh, how I detest myself!" he muttered, in an almost inaudible tone.

"For not having yet conquered

" 'On the battlefield of life?' "

she inquired, with a smile.

"No; but for having fallen, fallen, fallen so low!" he groaned.

In her total ignorance of the one dark page of his young life's story, and in her perfect confidence in his integrity, she misunderstood his words, and answered with calm cheerfulness:

"If you have fallen in the fight, dear Will, it has been under great odds, and pierced by many lances."

And she thought of his life, which had been one of continual misfortune from his childhood up; of his domestic calamities; of his individual labors, privations and struggles; his desperate efforts to educate himself and graduate at some college; his room in Williamsburg, of which she had heard accidentally, and where he had lived on bread without butter, and coffee without cream or sugar, and where he had washed his own

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clothes and cleaned his own apartment while studying in the college, and, after paying his fees, had sent almost every dollar of his earnings during the vacation to his aged and widowed mother. She did not wonder that he had sunk under such a burden. And she felt happy that she might be permitted to lighten it for him.

"Under many lances, dear Will! And fallen, and bruised, and wounded as you are, I esteem you higher and love you better than in the morning time of your health and hope. Yes, my dear, worn soldier, who fought so bravely—oh! so bravely—before you fell, you are dearer, more precious to me than ever before. You are not mortally wounded, Will. You will rise again stronger than ever. You will strive again on some great field, in some high cause, and you will win. You shake your head, Will; but I tell you that you will win."

He took her hand again and bowed over it with an expression of profoundest homage.

"And I will nurse you back to health and strength. And I, who have never known a mother's love, will be a real daughter to your dear mother, Will. We shall be so happy"—words meant to soothe and bless pierced like poisoned arrows.

"Why does she love me?" he asked himself, in his bitter self-scorn and humiliation. "Why does she love the poor devil that I am—a devil doubly damned that I dare to take her!"

And that, my reader, is a question that I have often asked myself in thinking of this pair. Why did that fair, strong, calm woman love that "poor devil"? Perhaps because she saw his innermost soul under its manifold external coverings. But I don't know. The poet rebuked such queries with his lines:

> "Why does she love him? 'Caviler,' be still!
> Is human love the work of human will?"

While the two sat side by side on the sofa, still talking and arranging the day of their marriage, the door opened and Mrs. Elde entered.

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Harcourt immediately arose, took the hand of Roma, led her to meet the lady, and said:

"Congratulate me, dear madam. Miss Fronde has promised to take me for her husband—on the fifteenth, subject to your approval."

"You have that with all my heart, and with my best wishes for your future happiness," said the widow, heartily; and then she kissed Roma, and shook hands with Harcourt.

"But I don't think he looks very happy over it, somehow. That poor boy has not yet recovered from his brain fever," she said, within herself, as the three took seats.

They dined together in their private parlor.

Mr. Gray joined them later, met Harcourt cordially, and told him that he ought to go into politics.

They spent the evening at the theater.

CHAPTER VIII

A SUDDEN WEDDING

"WELL, when are you to be married?" inquired Hanson, as he met Harcourt on the avenue the next morning.

"On the fifteenth, you fiend! And I wish with all my soul that you were to be hanged on that day instead!" hissed Harcourt, through his closed teeth.

"Oh, come, now!" coolly replied Hanson. "There is no question, you see, of my ever being hanged. It is some other fellow you are thinking of. And look here! It is not for you to take advantage of our peculiar relations to flatter me with such objectionable names. But the fact is, you know, that while you are forced to keep your part of our compact, you can abuse me with perfect impunity. Well, go on and use your privileges."

Harcourt passed on without reply.

But Hanson was not to be so shaken off. He turned and joined him, walking with him up the avenue.

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"Where do you propose to go after the ceremony?" inquired Hanson.

"I do not know. Nothing is settled yet. And I do not think that it is 'in the bond' that you should ask me all these questions!" exclaimed Harcourt.

"Oho! Isn't it, by the way? But I only speak to give you a little advice. Since the scene of the honeymoon is not yet settled, I will decide upon it for you. The Isle of Storms."

"Devil! Have you suddenly gone mad?"

"Oh, dear, no! You shall see how sane I am. Attend now. She, the queen of queens, the beauty of beauties, bride-elect, has a freak to pass a winter on the Isle of Storms. She invited my sister to join her in that Arctic expedition; and I do think the two princesses would have undertaken the adventure had not you interfered with your proposal of immediate marriage. Now it is not unlikely that she will take a fancy to spend her honeymoon there. If she should, you must favor the plan. And if you leave the city on the day of the wedding to go to the Isle of Storms, your plan would require that the marriage ceremony should take place very early in the morning—at dawn, indeed, as the boat leaves the pier at 6 A. M. sharp."

"That would be very awkward."

"Awkward in some respects, but extremely convenient in others. And the early marriage ceremony will not be unprecedented even in this city. I had a friend who was married at four o'clock in the morning, that he and his bride might take the 6 A. M. train to New York. It will cost something more, for it will be only just to give the minister a larger fee for turning out, and to tip the sexton and the clerk for opening the church at such an unearthly hour. But I will see to that. You shall have no trouble at all. I will attend to everything, my dear fellow, you know. And it will be quite natural that I should, for, of course, my sister, as the only bosom friend of the bride-elect, will be her bridesmaid, and who so fitting, under all the circumstances, to be your groomsman as myself?"

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Harcourt made no reply.

And as they were now in front of a certain "Gentlemen's Restaurant," Hanson said:

"Come in here. We will take a private room and order something, so as to have half an hour of uninterrupted conversation. I have some further suggestions to make in regard to this early marriage."

With a gesture of intense disgust and abhorrence, Harcourt followed the unscrupulous adventurer who had gained the mastery of his life.

A few days after this encounter, Ruth Elde and Roma Fronde sat in their private parlor discussing preparations for the coming wedding.

"I need not buy anything, auntie. I have plenty of clothes for ordinary occasions, and we are not going to be gay, you know. We are going to live very quietly until Will recovers his health," said Roma.

" 'Recovers his health!' The idea of you marrying a man in consumption!" exclaimed the widow.

"It was yourself that urged the matter on, you know, auntie."

"I know I did. It is all right, I suppose. I have heard of women marrying men who were on their deathbeds, and this marriage looks very like those."

"Will is not on his deathbed, auntie; nor even in a consumption. He is only overworked, and must have rest and comfort. Our wedding must be a very quiet one—as quiet 'as the law allows,' " she added, with a smile. "There must be no guests, no cards, 'no nothing,' as the negroes say. I should say no bridesmaids, but that my dear Reba would feel hurt. She and her mother must be present, as they are here in the city. Mr. Gray, I think, being our old neighbor, and papa's old friend, will do me the favor to act church father, and give me away."

"I think he will be very proud to do so. And Harcourt must have a groomsman. I wonder whom he will take? I don't believe he knows a soul in Washington except ourselves and Mr. Gray, Mr. Hanson and the Bushes."

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"I don't know. He has not thought of the necessity, I suppose. He will take whomsoever he likes."

"But he has not much choice. I shall suggest Mr. Hanson, as Mr. Gray can't act in that capacity."

"Pray, do not suggest anyone, auntie. Leave it to Will."

"All right. Leave it to Will with all my heart."

They sat in silence for a while, busy making incongruous matches between striped black and white silk, and plaid red and yellow velvet, or dotted blue and green plush, with checked purple and orange satin on crazyquilt squares, until Mrs. Elde suddenly inquired:

"Where do you think you will go for your marriage trip?" And without waiting for an answer, she went on immediately to say: "If that tiresome matter of the Delfcome consulship were settled in Mr. Gray's favor, and he was appointed, he and I might pair off also at the same time with you and Will Harcourt, and all of us could then go to Europe together."

"I am sure that Will could not bear a sea voyage at this season of the year, in his present state of health. No, if he is willing to do so, we will go to the Isle of Storms, and live quietly through the autumn, at least, and perhaps through the winter. What are you staring at, auntie?"

"At you. You must be out of your head. You were crazy enough to want to go there yourself; but to want to take an invalid to such a place you must be mad!"

Oh, auntie, how inconsistent you are! Just now you were proposing a sea voyage for him."

"That is a very different thing from the place where he was living at the time of that terrible tragedy, and which must be full of horrible associations for him."

"Dear auntie, Will Harcourt is no baby. And again you are inconsistent. It was you yourself who proposed that if I would go to the Isle of Storms for the winter I had better marry Mr. Harcourt, so that we could both go together."

"Yes, but that was before I had seen him since his illness, before I knew how much broken down he is. It

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seems quite a different thing now to take him into the house of the tragedy."

"We shall not go into the house of the tragedy. The tragedy was enacted in the eastern annex of the old house, and that and all the lath-and-plaster hotel additions have been taken down and carried off. They were mine, of course, by the terms of the lease, which expired two months ago; but I offered them all as a free gift to Todd, on condition that he would take them down and carry them off without delay. I have learned, by a letter received this morning, that the work has been done, and that my agent is rapidly having the premises cleaned up, and the manor house fitted for occupation."

"Well, upon my word, you and your agent have not let the grass grow under your feet!" exclaimed the widow.

"No, you are right, we have not. But now, you see, auntie, the scene of Yelverton's suicide has vanished from the island as if it had never been. The hotel has passed away like a dream, and the Crest House is no more; but Guyon Manor Hall stands alone in its old grandeur, awaiting the occupation of its new master and mistress. And there will be nothing to remind either of us of the dark days passed away."

"Upon my sacred word of honor, you take my breath. You go on so fast, Roma."

"Well, gather your breath, auntie, dear, and tell me if you have written to Mrs. Harcourt to invite her to be our guest for the marriage of her son."

"Yes, dear, I have; and I have done better than that, too. You know when I asked you to let me have five hundred dollars?"

"I remember."

"Well, you did not ask me what I wanted with it. You were too polite for that. Nor did I offer to tell you. I was too prudent for that; for I was not sure that you would approve. For, my dear, I have often heard you say that you would not dare to offer money to Will's mother——"

"Oh, I hope—I hope you did not want the money for

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that purpose! You would not have insulted an unfortunate gentlewoman in that manner," said Roma, in distress.

"Wait a bit, my dear. I didn't insult her. I did it all so nicely! I am sure if I committed any sin, the recording angel did not drop a tear to blot it out, but a whole society of angels shed a shower of tears. It would require all that, for I told such a lot of lies, and —and—Joe helped me."

"Oh, auntie! auntie! And who is Joe?"

"The Hon. Joel Gray, of course. But I call him Joe ever since we have been engaged, and he calls me Ru when nobody is by."

"Oh! And what did you make up between you?"

"Well, we concocted a letter between us, purporting to come from one Samuel Smiley, a mythical Baltimorean, who had once borrowed a large sum of money from the late Gen. Harcourt, of Lone Lodge, and who had never paid him, or been able to pay his widow until now; but that now, and from this period, he proposed to pay off the debt by installments, until the whole should be discharged. You see, my dear, I wanted to prepare a way to send more occasionally."

"And you did all this without consulting me?"

"Had to, my angel. You are such an angel that you would starve, or let your beloved starve, before you would save yourself or them by a pious lie; so I acted on my own responsibility."

"And Mr. Gray helped you?"

"Yes. Joe is a brick—a whole brick kiln! If it hadn't been for him I couldn't have carried it out. He took my letter to Baltimore, and posted it there; and I am expecting a favorable answer to my note of invitation from Washington; and Samuel Smiley will probably receive a grateful one, which Joe will go and hunt up in the Baltimore post office. You don't half thank me for risking my soul's salvation to get you out of a dilemma, and fetch your proud old mother-in-law to your wedding. Now, what do you think of it?"

"I do not know what to think—you did a wrong act —that I know—but your intention was so good—until

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you spoke of the 'proud' lady. Now I see clearly that but for the evil of pride there would have been no temptation of your benevolent heart to deceive. We could have sent the needed funds to the lady without the least offense. Ah, me! ah, me! it was the same pride that made her son half kill himself with work and privation rather than accept the slightest assistance from any friend or neighbor."

"I think, Roma, you must be a changeling. You cannot be a Fronde or a Guyon, for you have not the least bit of pride," exclaimed Mrs. Elde.

"Do not misunderstand me, auntie. I do believe in manly and womanly self-reliance and independence within certain limits; but not in the pride we speak of, for of all the insanities of the Inferno, I think that of pride is the maddest, as it is also often the most idiotic and imbecile," said Roma.

At this moment a servant entered and handed a letter to Mrs. Elde.

"Ah!" said the lady, as the man retired. "It is as I thought—a letter from Mrs. Harcourt!"

She opened the letter, glanced at its pages, and said:

"Well, she writes that she thanks me for the kind invitation I have given her—I!—as if you were not at the bottom of that and everything else. She says that, fortunately, she will be able to avail herself of my hospitable kindness—mine, indeed!—when it is yours all the time, though 'under the rose.' She says that she will be here the evening of the twelfth. That will be to-morrow. She says, further—but there, read the letter for yourself. It is more your business than mine, anyhow!" concluded Ruth Elde, as she put the paper in the hands of her niece.

Roma read on—the remainder of the missive being warm messages of affection to the prospective daughter-in-law, whom she loved without ever having seen.

Roma had scarcely finished the reading when the door opened once more, and young Harcourt came in with two letters in his hand.

"I have just received these from my mother," he

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said, when the usual greetings had passed between himself and the two women, and they were all seated. "She has surprised me very much by saying that she will be here to-morrow. I wrote several days since, asking her, if possible, to come for our marriage. She wrote, in reply, that it would not be possible, but that she would write to her dear prospective daughter-in-law all that was in her heart. Well, I got that reply when I reached my boarding-house late last night. It had come early in the day. I had some reason to expect such an answer, so I was not surprised. But by the first mail this morning I received these two. This one is for you, directed to my care."

He handed one of the letters to Roma, who opened it, and said:

"Permit me," and began to read it.

When she had finished, she returned it to Harcourt with a smile.

"It is a very sweet and precious greeting of me as her prospective daughter. Read it at your leisure. I am sure it will give you pleasure."

He took it gravely and put it in his breast pocket.

"Humph!" grunted Mrs. Elde, within herself. "As if anything could give that melancholy maniac any pleasure. He grows worse and worse! I believe, in my soul, he is going crazy! What will Roma do with him? I feel very guilty in ever having favored that marriage! Though I do suppose it would have taken place all the same, even if I had opposed it. Roma is so self-willed! Oh, me!" she sighed, as she contemplated the gloomy and despairing expression on the brow of the bridegroom-expectant.

"This," said the latter, referring to the first letter, still in her hand, "this to me, announces that my mother will be with us on the twelfth. She accepts the kind invitation of Mrs. Elde—of which, madam, I had not heard until the arrival of this letter, and for which I thank you very much," he added, turning to the elder lady.

"Not at all! Mrs. Harcourt does me great honor in becoming my guest," replied the widow.

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But there was one clause in that letter of which he did not speak to his friends. It was one in which the writer had said that, owing to an unexpected piece of good fortune in the sudden recovery of an old and forgotten debt, she had money enough, and much more than enough, to pay her traveling expenses, and provide herself with a proper "wedding garment" in which to attend her son's marriage; also that she was able to divide the money with her son, who was entitled to two-thirds of it, as it was the payment of a debt due to his late father. And with this explanation the widow had enclosed a check, not for two-thirds, but for four-fifths of the money—that is, for four hundred out of the five hundred she had received from the imaginary debtor. But as she had not mentioned the amount, her son supposed that it was six hundred dollars.

The check relieved him of an embarrassment about his own personal needs that, in the absorption of his deeper trouble, he had scarcely yet felt.

"Come!" said Mrs. Elde. "As this is the eleventh, and you are to be married on the fifteenth, I think it is time that something was settled about the hour of the ceremony and the direction of the wedding trip."

"I leave all these matters to Roma," said Harcourt.

"I wish to go to the Isle of Storms. The hotel buildings are all taken down, and there is nothing standing but the old Guyon Manor House and its outhouses; nothing to remind us of the Crest House tragedy. Would you like to go there, Will?" inquired the young lady.

"Certainly, if you please, Roma."

"Then we will go there."

"Do you happen to know at what hour you will have to take the Norfolk boat, which is the only one that pretends to leave passengers in that out-of-the-way place?" inquired the provoked widow.

"I do," replied Harcourt.

"It is six o'clock in the morning, which, at this season of the year, is about sunrise. So, if you intend to start on your trip immediately after the marriage

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ceremony, you will have to be married at about half-past four in the morning, like Mons. Buckhorn and his bride."

"I should not mind that! I should even prefer the early hour. We should by that avoid the idlers who will come around a church where a marriage is going on," said Roma.

"Well, that is settled. Now as to the bridesmaids, Roma has decided to have only one—Rebecca Bushe. Who is to be your groomsman, Mr Harcourt?" inquired Mrs. Elde.

"Her brother," answered Harcourt, in a low tone; "that is, if Roma approves," he added.

"Certainly I do. It is a good selection, and Reba will be pleased."

Harcourt suppressed a groan. He had obeyed his evil spirit's orders in agreeing to all these arrangements, which tended to the furtherance of Hanson's treacherous plot.

After a little more talk, Harcourt bade his friends good-day and left the house.

"Roma," said Mrs. Elde, as soon as they were alone, "that young man is either very ill or he has something on his mind. He looks worse, much worse, than when he first came here. I really think your marriage ought to be deferred for a time."

"What nonsense you talk, auntie, dear! There is nothing the matter with Will but nervous exhaustion from severe overwork. He will recover with rest. And how inconsistent you are, auntie. You are the very one who urged on the marriage."

"That was before I knew how really ill he was."

"If he is as bad as you think, auntie, so much the more reason why he should have a wife to take care of him."

"Well, I wash my hands of the affair. A willful woman will have her way."

And there the dispute ended for the time being.

On the evening of the next day Mr. Harcourt, Mrs. Elde and Miss Fronde went in a carriage to meet Mrs. Harcourt at the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Depot.

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They reached the waiting room before the train came in. Harcourt found comfortable seats for the two women, and then went out to the platform to wait for the arrival of the train.

Very soon the thunder of the coming engine shook the earth, and the Baltimore and Ohio express ran into the station.

At this moment Hanson stepped up and accosted Harcourt.

"Ah, good-evening! Waiting for some one?"

"Mother," answered the young man, moodily.

"Ah! You must introduce me."

Harcourt did not reply, but hurried by to meet the crowd pouring from the train which had just stopped.

Among the motley multitude was easily to be seen the tall, stately form of Dorothy Harcourt, with her white hair and fair, patrician features. She was dressed in black silk from head to foot.

"My dear mother!" murmured the young son, and kissed her.

"Oh, Will, my boy! I think that fortune has changed for us. I wish you so much happiness, my dear. But you are not looking well. Not even so well as when you left me. You have been sitting up too late at nights, my dear; entering too ardently into the life of the city, I am afraid," she said, as she took his arm, and they walked down the platform together.

Harcourt did not reply, for Hanson was advancing to meet them, and now stopped directly in the way of their progress, and raised his hat with an air of great deference to the lady.

Harcourt had no alternative but to present him.

"My dear mother, let me introduce Mr. Hanson—Mrs. Harcourt."

The lady bowed.

The man said:

"I feel honored in making your acquaintance, madam. I hope you have had a pleasant journey."

"Thank you, sir. Quite a pleasant one. The day has been very fine," courteously replied the old lady.

Hanson turned and walked with the mother and son,

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until they reached the entrance of the ladies' waiting room. Then he lifted his hat and said:

"I wish you good-evening, madam. Can I do anything for you? See to your baggage? Call a carriage?"

Mrs. Harcourt looked at her son, inquiringly.

"No, thank you," replied the young man. "We have a carriage engaged, and I shall see to the baggage presently."

And he took his mother into the waiting room, where they found Mrs. Elde and Miss Fronde, who immediately arose and came forward to meet them.

Harcourt presented his mother first to Mrs. Elde, who received her with marked deference.

"You do me very great honor, madam, and give me great pleasure."

"You are so very kind that thanks seem inadequate," began the old lady; but at that moment Harcourt presented his betrothed; he faltered in uttering the brief words:

"My mother, Miss Fronde."

The two women raised their eyes simultaneously, and for one moment their incisive glances met in deep, instinctive search into each other's soul, and then the elder woman opened her arms very quietly and folded the younger one to her bosom, saying:

"You are a noble and beautiful creature, my dear. May the Lord bless you and make you ever happy."

Roma returned the embrace and murmured:

"I pray to be worthy of His blessing and your love."

"Take seats for a few moments, while I go and get your trunk, mother, and have it put on the hack," said Will Harcourt, as he left the waiting room.

On the platform outside he was again intercepted by Hanson, who said:

"A magnificent old lady, that mother of yours. A grande dame of the ancient régime! She could bear sorrow, privation, martyrdom, with the courage of Zenobia or Semiramis; but she could not bear shame. So see that you do not shrink and fail me at the last moment."

"Hanson! Fiend! I am on the very verge of in-

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sanity! Do not drive me too far or I shall—I feel I shall—go mad!"

CHAPTER IX

AT DAWN OF DAY

William Hanson attended to all the official business of the wedding ceremony, as, indeed, the groomsman—or as it is now the custom to call him, the best man—often does. He got out the marriage license, engaged the minister, to whom he explained the expediency, and with whom he stipulated for the accommodation of an early hour for the nuptial rites, and he interviewed the sexton, to whom, with the minister's consent, he gave particular instructions about opening and lighting the church.

In the hotel Mrs. Elde gave orders for an early breakfast by gaslight, as for travelers who were to take a very early train or boat. She said nothing of the intended wedding, as she did not wish to have any gossip about it among the guests of the house.

Roma had insisted upon one point—that her young cousins, the Elde boys, should be sent for to be present at the ceremony. Accordingly, Mrs. Elde had written to their tutor, Mr. Timothy Toomie, to bring them at once to Washington.

They arrived on Monday evening, hilarious in anticipation of "fun."

The two lads burst tumultuously into the parlor, where they found Roma alone. They fell upon their cousin and overwhelmed her with caresses, which she warmly returned.

Abbot brought a pet pigeon in a pretty cage, and Rudolph brought a book of pressed ferns, as wedding presents to the bride, who received both with charming graciousness.

"You must love and pet Cupid—his name is Cupid—very much indeed, or he will break his heart at being

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parted from Psyche—that is his mate, you know," said the elder boy, as he took the bird from the cage and put it in Roma's hand.

"Oh, Abb, my dear, did you really take him from his mate?" inquired the young lady, in a tone of pity.

"Oh, I reckon he won't mind it much, if you pet him. He's only a pigeon, you know. And anyways, if he should pine, you just drop me a note, and I'll send Psyche to you. I most wish I had brought both," added the boy, regretfully.

"Oh, do, Abb, stop your gab and get away. You are taking all the talk to yourself; and I want to show Ro my ferns," exclaimed Rudolph, shouldering between his brother and his cousin, and laying the open volume on her lap.

"Here, put the pigeon in his cage for the present, dear. I shall prize him very much, and love him very dearly. Now, then, Rudy," said the young lady.

"See, Roma, I gathered these ferns from everywhere we went this summer. Some from the Palisades, some from the White Mountains, and some from the Adirondacks. There is a great variety of them," said the boy, with much pride in his collection.

"I shall value these the more that your hands gathered and arranged them; but, dear boys, why do you give me these treasures which must be so precious to yourselves?" she inquired, looking from one beaming face to the other.

"Oh, we talked together about it, Rudy and I, and we thought these were the best we had to give," said Abbot, heartily.

"It was all we had to give," added Rudolph, "unless we had offered you some of our school books or clothes, which wouldn't have been of much use, I reckon."

"You dear boys! I shall cherish these gifts," said Roma, warmly.

"And will you take them down to the Isle of Storms with you?" inquired Abbot.

"I certainly shall," she answered.

"And may we come and spend the Christmas holi-

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days with you, if you stay there, Roma?" pleaded Rudolph.

"You certainly may," she answered, and kissed them both.

"Now, where is Mr. Harcourt? We have not seen him since he went away from Goblin Hall that autumn, a year ago," said Abbot.

"And we want to see him awfully," added Rudolph.

"Well, you shall. He will dine with us to-night."

"And the wedding will be to-morrow morning, before sunrise?" inquired Abbot.

"Yes, dear; but we do not wish you to speak of it."

"Why not?" demanded Rudolph, with a spoiled boy's abruptness.

"Because, dear, we do not wish a party of anxious strangers to follow us to the church. It would not be pleasant."

"Oh, I think it would be jolly!" exclaimed Abbot.

"And why won't you let the people see the show if they want to?" inquired Rudolph.

The entrance of old Mrs. Harcourt and Mrs. Elde saved the necessity of a reply.

"Where is Mr. Toomie?" inquired the latter.

"Oh, he has gone to his room to read," said Abbot.

"No, he hasn't. He has gone to meditate," corrected Rudolph.

"Poor little wretch," murmured the mother. Then, with some compunction, she added: "I ought not to say that before the boys."

There was to be a small dinner party in Mrs. Elde's rooms that evening in honor of the approaching wedding, and the friends who were to assist at the ceremony were the only guests. These were Mrs. and Miss Bushe, Mr. Gray, Mr. Hanson, and, of course, Harcourt.

Will Harcourt was the first to present himself.

The two boys, his former pupils, fell upon him at once, and overwhelmed him with greetings, before they perceived his altered looks. Then Abbot exclaimed:

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"Oh, lordy, Mr. Harcourt, how awful bad you do look. Have you—have you—got the toothache?"

"No, you ninny!" cried Rudolph. "He's afraid of Roma. I should be, I know, if I was going to marry her; though I love her awfully, all the same."

"Boys!" called their mother, as sternly as she could speak, "behave yourselves!"

Dinner was announced, and the small company filed into the private dining room, that had been engaged for the occasion.

The feast, of many courses, was rather prolonged.

After it was over, and the small company returned to the parlor, the evening passed as pleasantly as possible under the circumstances.

Mr. Gray devoted himself to old Mrs. Harcourt, whose husband and elder sons he had known. Hanson engaged Mrs. Elde in conversation. Harcourt, Roma and the two boys formed a quartet, which might have been a merry one but for the heavy gloom that hung over the young man's manner, and at which the boys wondered, and over which Roma secretly mourned.

The company separated at an early hour, Mrs. Bushe and Messrs. Harcourt, Hanson and Gray going away together; Toomie and the two boys retiring to the double-bedded chamber they occupied in common, and Mrs. Harcourt and Miss Bushe withdrawing to their own rooms to get a long night's rest in preparation to rising early the next morning. Mrs. Elde and Miss Fronde were left alone together in the parlor.

"Roma, my darling," said the matron, taking a seat by the side of the girl, "I have been watching Will Harcourt all the evening. My dear, that man is not sane! He is not, really! And his insanity takes the most hopeless form—melancholia. I am so sure of it that I would advise you to withdraw from this marriage even now."

"Aunt Ruth, I have told you before that his condition is merely that of an incomplete convalescence from brain fever, and——"

"No doubt of it!" interrupted the widow; "but the

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condition is melancholia, the most hopeless form of mania. Oh, Roma, be warned in time!"

"Aunt Ruth, the iller Will is, the sooner I will marry him, that I may devote myself to him and restore him to health. I would no more desert Will in his illness now than I would abandon him for such a cause if he were already my husband. I am not a fair-weather friend only, Aunt Ruth."

The widow sighed deeply, and said:

"Well, go on; I have no more to say but this:

"'A willful woman will have her way,'"

Roma arose.

"Shall we say 'good-night,' Aunt Ruth?"

"Yes. Good-night, Roma. I wish something would happen before morning to prevent this marriage," she added, as she arose and followed her niece out of the room.

But nothing happened to avert the doom.

At dawn of day the bride's set of the small wedding party were assembled in the parlor of Mrs. Elde's suit, breakfasting by gaslight. There were present Mrs. Harcourt, Mrs. Elde, Mis Fronde, Miss Bushe, Mr. Toomie and the two boys.

All Roma's baggage, except the bird cage, had been forwarded to the steamer on the afternoon of the previous day; and the bird cage containing the pigeon was jealously watched by Abbot, lest it should be forgotten and left behind.

But for the chatter of the boys, the meal would have passed almost in silence; but they kept up a continual fire of questions or remarks.

"Mamma, Roma says we may come down and spend the Christmas holidays on the Isle of Storms with her."

"Mamma, what makes them call that place the Isle of Storms? It is any stormier there than it is anywhere else?"

"Say, mamma, are we all going back to Goblin Hall as soon as all the wedding fun is over?"

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"Oh, Mrs. Harcourt, mamma says you are going to Goblin Hall with us to spend a month! Oh, couldn't you stay all the winter? Couldn't you stay always? It is such a jolly place, and 'the more the merrier,' you know," etc., etc., etc.

When breakfast was over, the three ladies put on their bonnets and wraps to go to the church. They wore their ordinary street dresses, except Roma, who wore a traveling suit of dark blue Irish poplin, with mantle, hat and gloves to match.

In front of the ladies' entrance stood two carriages. Into one entered Mrs. Harcourt, Mrs. Elde, Miss Fronde and Miss Bushe. In the other Mr. Toomie, the two boys, and—the bird cage in Master Abbot's charge.

They drove over to South Washington—then called the island, because it lay between the canal and the river—and they drew up before the entrance of a little mission church, not far from the steamboat landing. This church was chosen by Hanson for the convenience of the embarkation of the wedded pair at this early hour.

They alighted from the carriages and entered the church. In the vestibule they found Messrs. Harcourt, Hanson and Gray awaiting them. After the morning greetings were over, Mr. Gray gave his arm to the bride, for whom he was to be "church father," and led the way up the aisle, followed by Mr. Hanson and Miss Bushe, Mr Harcourt and Mrs. Elde, Mr. Toomie and Mrs. Harcourt, and finally the two boys, who brought up the rear.

The interior was badly lighted. Something seemed amiss with the gas. But as this was not a grand wedding, the imperfect light was of little consequence.

The minister, in his vestments, stood within the chancel awaiting the party, who, on reaching the spot, bowed, and then formed in a semi-circle before the altar.

The ceremony commenced in the usual form, and proceeded until the question was reached:

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"Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?"

Then Mr. Gray, advancing, said:

"I do," and took the hand of Roma, and was about to place it in that of William Harcourt, when suddenly the dimly burning gas dropped almost out.

There was a moment of hesitation and disturbance, and then William Hanson said:

"Proceed, sir, if you please. We need not stop for this. You know the formula, and—our friends here have to catch the Norfolk boat, which leaves in half an hour."

And the ceremony proceeded to its conclusion. The benediction was pronounced, the congratulations were offered, and the parties went into the vestry to sign the register.

The gas there was no better than that in the church, and the light was so imperfect that the bride and bridegroom and witnesses could scarcely see to sign their names. When this was done and the wedding party returned into the church, the gas flared up as suddenly as it had flickered down, and the whole place was illuminated.

Then it was seen that all faces, execept that of Roma, looked pale and awed, but the palest and ghastliest there was that of Will Harcourt.

"We have no time to lose, friends, if we wish to secure the boat," said William Hanson, hurrying the party toward the carriages.

"I never knew of such a thing to occur in all my life before. It makes my blood run cold! It seems to me a bad omen," whispered Mrs. Elde to Mr. Gray, as they followed Roma and Harcourt from the church.

"It was awkward. But I was once present at a large evening party in Philadelphia where the gas suddenly went out and left us all in darkness. It was full five minutes before it could be lighted up again," answered the member from Maryland. By this time they had reached the carriages.

"We are all going to see the young pair off," said Mrs. Elde.

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The bride and groom, with the bridesmaid and groomsman, entered the carriage provided for them and led the way to the steamboat wharf.

Mr. Gray, Mrs. Elde and Mrs. Harcourt followed in the second carriage.

Mr. Toomie, the two boys and the bird cage, still in charge of Master Abbot Elde, brought up the rear in the third.

And so they drove down to the pier, where the boat was already getting up her steam to start.

They all alighted and went on board.

The eastern horizon was now flushed with all the colors of the rainbow from the rising sun, which, however, had not yet appeared above the line.

They stood upon the deck.

"Come with us, mother, dear," said Roma, taking the hand of the aged widow and leading her to a bench where the three—mother, son and daughter-in-law—sat down together, a little away from the other passengers.

"God bless you, my dear!" murmured the aged lady.

"You have no daughter on earth but me; I no mother but you. I will try to be a true daughter to you," said Roma, earnestly.

"You will be true in every relation in life, my child, I am sure," said Mrs. Harcourt, looking fondly on the young woman.

"You will go to Goblin Hall with my aunt?" inquired Roma.

"Yes, dear."

"I am very glad you will go there. It is a fine, old place. And you will either come to us at the Isle of Storms very soon, or you will stay at Goblin Hall until our return thither, will you not?"

"Yes, dear, probably."

"Do whatever may suit your health, or pleasure, or convenience best, will you not?"

"Thank you, dear. I will."

"I will write to you by every mail. And will you write to me as often as you can?"

"I will answer every one of your letters, dear."

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"All ashore!"

They arose at the warning shout and went quickly forward to the gang plank, where their friends were waiting for them.

"Good-by, my sweet daughter!" said the aged lady, folding the girl to her bosom in a fond embrace, which the latter returned with fervor.

"Good-by, my dear son! Cherish her well! Cherish her as your life, my boy," she said to Will, who pressed his mother to his heart, kissed her cheek and turned aside to hide his emotion.

Other hasty adieus followed from other friends.

"Here, Mr. Harcourt," exclaimed Abbot Elde, holding up the cage with the pigeon, "you take this. You are careful! You won't forget and leave this behind! It is my wedding present to Roma, but it couldn't be packed in the trunk with the ferns and other presents, you know, so I have carted it in my own hands the whole of this go! Will you take good care of it now?"

"Yes, my boy," Harcourt replied, mechanically, as he took the cage.

"Come, Abbot! Hurry up, my dear," exclaimed his mother, who had crossed the gang plank.

"All right, mamma! I'm coming!" he said, and he went.

"Bill, you'll be left behind!" exclaimed Miss Bushe, seeing that Hanson lingered on the deck.

"Quite so," coolly replied the young man. "At this last moment I have decided to go on the boat as far as Alexandria, where the yacht lies, and, perhaps, to take a trip in her down the river. By-by!"

"You are such an eccentric person that—that you are good riddance on any condition," added Reba Bushe, with a laugh.

The plank was drawn in. Last adieus were waved from the deck, and the boat turned and steamed away from the wharf, just as the sun blazed up from behind the eastern hills of Maryland lighting up the river, the autumn woods on one side, the thousands of windows in the city on the other side, and shining on the dome of the capitol.

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"That is a good omen, at any rate!" said Reba Bushe to Mrs. Harcourt, as they left the wharf and re-entered their carriage to drive back to their hotel.

The boat steamed down the river.

Roma, Harcourt and Hanson stood on the deck together, looking after their friends until the carriages rolled away from the wharf.

Then Harcourt found a seat for Roma and placed himself by her side.

Hanson sauntered up and took a seat on the other side of the lady. She looked a little surprised at this intrusion; but Hanson was so cool, so seemingly unconscious of offending, so extremely polite in every other respect that she could but smile a welcome and make some remark about the beauty of the morning.

"Yes," he replied. "You could not have had a more glorious day for the trip."

"At what hour shall we reach the Isle of Storms?" inquired Roma of Harcourt.

"If we have—a good run—we shall get there—about midnight—or it may be—an hour later," answered the young man, speaking with hesitation and difficulty, like one who could hardly collect his thoughts, or, when collected, express them.

Roma looked at him in some distress, but in more hope, and she longed for Hanson to go away and leave them alone, so that she might comfort Will.

But Hanson stayed by them, and seemed not to know that he was intruding, while he tried to make himself as agreeable as possible.

"When shall we reach Alexandria?" inquired Roma, believing that they would then get rid of Hanson.

"At about seven o'clock. And it is now a quarter past six," replied Hanson.

And then he pointed to the Virginia shore, and said:

"See! We are just opposite Arlington! What a very magnificent estate! And do look at the effect of the autumn foliage on those hills!—the brilliant hue of crimson, gold, purple, scarlet, brown and orange, mingled with evergreen—all lighted up in the blaze of the early morning sun! Is it not splendid!"

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In this way he made conversation, and kept his place until the boat neared Alexandria.

There was no more than usual shipping at the little port, but out in the river stood at anchor an elegant schooner-rigged yacht.

"Is that your 'Rover'?" inquired the bride, willing to be friendly with the intrusive fellow-traveler, since he was so soon to leave the boat.

"Yes, that is my little craft," replied Hanson.

"Can you signal her in any way to send off a boat for you?"

"No, I have no means of doing so."

"Then how will you reach her? Oh! I suppose you can hire a boat at the wharf."

"I might do so, but I do not think that I will. I have a fancy for taking a trip down the river, perhaps as far as Old Point Comfort," said Hanson.

Roma could not control the feeling of disappointment that found expression in her face, nor could she trust herself to speak.

The boat landed to take in freight and passengers from Alexandria, and as Hanson still kept his place by her side, she said to Harcourt:

"Will, dear, the deck is not the pleasantest place to sit while the boat is at this wharf. Take me into the cabin, please."

Harcourt arose and gave his arm.

"And now," she thought, "we shall get rid of that well-meaning bore."

But she was mistaken. To her surprise and annoyance, Hanson arose in a matter-of-course manner, as if he belonged to the party, and accompanied them down into the cabin, and sat down with them on the sofa.

This was growing to be intolerable. Not one confidential word had she been able to exchange with Harcourt since the day previous. She longed to ask Will the cause of his deep depression, a depression that she herself was now beginning to feel! But here was this man always shadowing them, as if he had them in custody. But she would be patient. Even if he should

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persist in keeping near them, so long as they should be "in the same boat," the persecution must end when they should reach Old Point, which would be early in the evening when he would get off and they would be rid of him.

The boat started again, and steamed down the river.

When they had left the city far behind, and the river was broadening into a grand and spacious water view, Roma proposed to return to the deck, and they all went up and seated themselves—Roma on a bench with Harcourt on one side, and Hanson on the other.

The calm temper of this lady was beginning to be disturbed, especially as she felt sure that the presence of this unconscious intruder was even more disagreeable to Mr. Harcourt than to herself. But what could she do? Or what could Will do?

Nothing without positive rudeness or indelicacy.

The unwelcome companion seemed so utterly unconscious of giving offense.

He tried to entertain them. He pointed out the beauty and variety of the river banks east and west —the wooded headlands clothed in the gorgeous autumn colors, the inlets winding up from the river, and losing themselves among the wooded hills and vales inland, the farmhouses with their barns and haystacks, that shone white or golden among trees or in fields.

When they were opposite Mount Vernon he called their attention to that venerable historic mansion, and expatiated on the subject.

Roma replied no more than courtesy required, while Harcourt answered not a word. His gloom deepened and deepened. Surely never was such a wedding trip ever made by married lovers. It must have tried the love of Roma as much as it tried her patience, but that her affection for the unfortunate youth was so pure, profound and unselfish.

His melancholia was very ill to endure, but it must have been worse, much worse for him to bear than for herself. If Will Harcourt had been blown up on a steamboat explosion and escaped with just his life

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—blinded, crippled, mutilated—she would have married him all the same, and found happiness in soothing his sorrows, and ministering to his needs; for she felt that he belonged to her, and she had always felt so from the first moment her glance had fallen on the dark-eyed youth; and that no less she belonged to him, and was responsible for his welfare.

This melancholia, she confessed to herself, was worse then blindness, lameness or any bodily ill, except that it was probably more curable; and it would be her business and her happiness to cure it.

The forenoon waned, but the three never left their seats. There was no lady passenger except Roma on the boat. There were a few men, mostly farmers or country merchants, returning home from business trips to the cities.

Occasionally the steamer stopped in midstream and sent off a boat to put one or more of these passengers ashore at a point on the banks nearest their homes.

The three with whom we have to do remained in their seats until dinner was served.

Then Harcourt arose and offered his arm to Roma, and took her to the saloon, closely followed by Hanson.

At table Harcourt sat on the right of the lady and Hanson on her left.

Hanson laid himself out to be very attentive to both his companions, as if, indeed, he had been their host instead of their fellow-traveler.

After dinner they returned to the deck.

They were now passing Piney Point. Roma observed that Harcourt's gloom had deepened almost to stupor. He sat, as usual, to her right on the bench, and Hanson to her left. She felt that she really must get rid of Hanson somehow, so, at length, she said:

"Will, dear, I am tired of this; can you see me to my stateroom?"

Harcourt got up immediately, gave her his arm, and took her down to the cabin, followed by Hanson.

Then he took her to the door of her stateroom, opened it, let her pass in, and saying:

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"I will send the stewardess to you, my dear," closed the door and left her alone.

Roma was too much amazed to think consecutively.

Did he not care to speak to her alone? How strangely he acted. Was he—was he—really insane, after all? Was his malady something even worse than melancholy? It was a terrible thought. But even if so, she could not for a moment regret that she had consented to be his wife.

"Even if such a fate is in store for Will, I shall be able to make his lot more endurable than it would be without me—for I know how he loves me," she said to herself.

She did not lie down, nor even sit, but stood before the little window that lighted her stateroom, and looked out upon the waters in sad reflections, until presently she was interrupted by a tap at her door. She hoped it was Will Harcourt outside, and she said:

"Come in."

The stewardess—a pretty mulatto girl—opened the door.

"The gentleman sent me, ma'am. Can I do anything for you?"

"Thank you, no. Stay!" said the lady, as the girl was about to go.

The girl paused.

"You saw the two gentlemen who were with me?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Where are they?"

"They are walking up and down on deck, talking to each other."

"Well, will you go to the gentleman who sent you to me—Mr. Harcourt, the dark-haired one—and tell him that I wish to speak to him, and ask him if he will be kind enough to come to me?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the girl, and disappeared on her errand.

Roma waited, but nothing came of her message. After ten or fifteen minutes had passed, she said to herself:

"Oh, the stewardess has forgotten or neglected to

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deliver my message, or else she could not find Mr. Harcourt. I will return to the deck."

And she left her room and went up.

The short autumn afternoon was drawing to a close. The sun was on the very edge of the western horizon, casting a long path of golden light across the waters of the river, that broadened out here like an arm of the sea.

Roma soon perceived the two men, one of whom she sought. They were standing together in the forward end of the boat, looking down the river.

She went up to them.

Both turned at her approach, but only Hanson spoke to her.

'Ah, you have come back to us, madam. I hope you have had a refreshing rest," he said.

'Thank you," politely replied Roma; but she said nothing about her "rest." She longed to say to Will Harcourt:

"I sent for you to come and speak to me. Why did you do not do so?"

But she felt that she could not possibly say these words, ask this question, in the presence of Hanson

She looked at Harcourt, and her heart sank. He did not speak to her, but met the gaze of her clear, blue eyes with a look of unutterable anguish in his own dark, unfathomable orbs.

The sound of the tea bell was a relief to all.

Harcourt gave Roma his arm in silence, and led her to the saloon, followed, as before, as always, by Hanson, who took the seat on the lady's left, while Harcourt sat on her right.

CHAPTER X.

THE SHADES OF NIGHT

When tea was over the three returned to the deck. The sun had long set, and every vestige of color had faded from the western horizon.

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There was no moon, but there were no clouds, and the stars shone brilliantly.

"We are nearing the mouth of the river. Clear and calm as it is, we shall find it very rough in rounding Smith's Point," said Hanson, as he coolly took a seat beside Roma, while Harcourt sat on her other side.

The hours passed on. The night grew more luminous with stars. But though there was no wind, the water grew rougher as they passed out of the mouth of the river, and began to round the point.

"Would you—— Does the motion of the boat affect you?" inquired Harcourt.

And these were almost the only words he had voluntarily spoken to her since the day before.

"Yes," she quickly replied. "I would like to go below."

He gave her his arm and took her down, followed by Hanson.

Roma went straight to the stateroom and entered it.

Harcourt left her at the door and went back to the deck with Hanson.

"Come, let us go forward and enjoy doubling the point," said the latter, coolly.

"Oh, you incarnate fiend! How I would enjoy doubling you up and pitching you into the sea!" burst from the laboring bosom of the young man.

"No doubt you would, but you couldn't. I forgive you. The beaten have a right to swear," calmly replied the victor, as they went forward and found seats.

There were other watchers on the deck; a farmer and a country merchant stood watching the two men where they sat.

"The lady has turned in," said the farmer. "They say she is a bride, but hang me if I know which is the bridegroom."

"Why, the fair fellow, of course, is the happy man. How could anyone make any mistake? The dark youth looks too young, and much too miserable."

"Well, then, why is the dark one always with the other two? Tell me that."

"I don't know."

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"One would think that a newly married pair would like to be alone sometimes. And what a handsome pair. By Jove! the lady is the finest-looking woman I ever saw in all my life!"

"Ugh! what a lurch that was!" exclaimed the merchant, as the boat suddenly dipped into the sea and rolled heavily. "I shall have to turn in, or—throw up!"

And he hurried away, leaving the farmer sitting there star-gazing alone.

The dusk hours sped on. The boat was on the bay. The water was smoother.

Roma sat alone in her stateroom. Had she been a weak or nervous woman she might have given way to a paroxysm of hysterical sobs and tears, and found relief in the reaction; but with her magnificent physique she possessed great strength of mind and body, and perfect, absolute self-control under all circumstances. How that strength and self-control were to be strained and tried to the utmost she did not yet know.

Now she suffered silently—not from being left alone, not from any paltry jealousy of the respect that was her due, not from any suspicions of willful neglect by Will Harcourt—but from the consciousness of some evil surrounding her beloved—some evil that she could not touch, dispel or understand because she could not speak one private word to him, or ask one confidential question. With all her strength and self-control she suffered probably much more than a weaker or more nervous woman could, because she had no relief in tears or sobs. Her splendid physique was a grand thing in many respects, but it was a terrible thing in this, that it held her suffering spirit in bonds of strong material life, through which even anguish could find no utterance, no ventilation.

One hope she had, one certainty, she said, but she could not feel it to be a certainty—that they would soon reach the Isle of Storms, and that there they would land—there they would be rid forever of this Hanson, whose presence seemed to overshadow them like the wings of some infernal spirit from the pit.

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And with this thought she tried to soothe the deep, dull, intolerable heartache that tortured her.

The hours sped on. She did not go on deck again, nor did she even come out into the cabin, but sat in her stateroom until the motion of the boat stopped, and a voice called out:

"Passengers for the Isle of Storms!"

"Thank Heaven!" she said, and started up to put on her hat and mantle, and to gather up her parasol, hand bag, etc.

In the midst of her hurried occupation there came a knock at the door

"Come in," she said.

Harcourt opened the door, but remained standing without, and carrying the bird cage in his hand.

"We must go on shore," he said, briefly.

"Oh, Will; I am so glad—so glad to go home. This has not been a pleasant trip for us. That man——" But as Roma spoke, she caught sight of Hanson standing behind Harcourt, and she stopped suddenly.

Harcourt made no response to her exclamation of delight.

"I thought you were to get off at Old Point Comfort," she said, rather coldly.

He bowed and smiled.

"My dear lady, Old Point Comfort is some miles below this," he said.

"Oh! I thought——" she began, and again stopped. It was useless, she reflected, to snub this bore at the last moment, when they were about to get rid of him.

Will Harcourt drew her arm within his own, and led her up on the deck. The boat to take them to the Isle was manned and laden with their luggage, and waiting for them alongside the steamer.

"Good-by, Mr. Hanson. Give my love to your sister when you see her. Tell her she must come to me at her very earliest convenience," said Roma, graciously, as she passed down to the lower deck.

Hanson lifted his hat, smiled and—followed them.

Harcourt carefully assisted Roma to pass over the plank between the lower deck and the little boat,

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placed her on the one comfortable seat in the stern, and sat down near her.

Hanson stepped into the boat and took another seat. Roma stared at him.

Hanson took no notice.

"I will see you safely domiciled on the island. Then I can return by this boat to the steamer, and pursue my journey," he said, in explanation, and in answer to Roma's look of disappointment and annoyance.

"'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick,'" replied the lady, with unconcealed repugnance. This rude persistence in forcing his company upon them certainly deserved no forbearance at her hands.

He smiled and bowed, as if he had received a compliment.

The night was still clear, dark, yet brilliant with stars. The surface of the water was calm. Neither shore of the bay was in sight. There was nothing visible between sea and sky but the steamer they had left behind them, lying still and letting off steam in puffs like a veteran smoker, and the isle that lay before them like some huge pre-Adamite sea serpent floating on the water.

A cluster of lights, that grew brighter as they neared the isle, showed that the old manor house had been prepared and was waiting to welcome its new master and mistress.

A rapid row of not more than ten minutes—performed in utter silence since Roma's last words—brought them into one of the little inlets formed by a curve of the "Serpent" on the west side.

The boatmen drew in their oars, and using them as poles, pushed the little boat up until it grated on the sands, and threw out a plank as a bridge across the wet ground.

"Good-by, Mr. Hanson," said Roma, as she arose and gave her hand to Harcourt, to help her to land.

Hanson lifted his hat and smiled.

"I shall do myself the honor of attending you to the house," he said.

Then turning to the boat's crew, he added:

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"I shall not keep you waiting longer than you are obliged to wait while unloading the boat and sending the luggage to the house."

Having said this, he turned and followed Harcourt and Roma over the pathless stubble fields, through which they had to approach the house from this side. He overtook them and walked beside Roma, trying, or pretending to try, to make himself agreeable by praising the place.

"A grand estate! By Jove! a little kingdom in itself. I congratulate you on such a possession, Queen Romania," he said, with a bow.

She made no reply.

They came at length to the boundary of the field, and to a broad, old avenue, shaded by oak trees now in their autumn dress, and carpeted by fallen leaves, which swept with a curve around to the front of the house, which faced the south. The front windows on the ground floor were lighted from within.

They went up the steps to the door that was thrown open to receive them.

Harcourt led Roma in.

"Good-by, Mr. Hanson," said Roma, for the third time that night. "Your boat waits, I suppose, so we will not try to detain you."

As before he lifted his hat, smiled and bowed.

"I wonder if he means to follow us in," said Roma to herself. "The presumption of that man exceeds all bounds."

But instead of entering the hall, he turned to Harcourt, and said:

"Come, will you walk down with me to the boat?"

Without a word, Harcourt nodded assent.

Hanson once more lifted his hat to Roma, and turned away, followed by Harcourt.

Two boatmen were bringing up a large trunk between them. They were followed by another, laden with other luggage—all of which the men deposited in the hall. And then they hurried away.

Roma found herself in a fine, spacious, old hall, with a broad, oaken stairway rising before her, with wide

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doors at the front and back, and other doors at the sides opening into rooms. The walls of the old hall were paneled in red and white oak; the doors were of red and black oak; and the floor in red and black. The effect was rich, rare and quaint. There was no furniture but an old, walnut hall table on one side and four heavy, walnut chairs.

Roma was very much pleased with the old-fashioned character of the place, and was thinking how any attempt at "modern improvement" must spoil it, when she was accosted by a fat, comfortable-looking colored woman, of middle age, in a red merino gown and a white apron and white turban, who came from the shades at the back of the hall, and, after courtesying several times, said:

"Sarvint, ma'am. Your room is ready, ma'am, a good fire burning, and everything well aired and laid out fresh."

"Thank you," said Roma. "Yes, I would like to go. My servants are here, I suppose?"

"Servants, ma'am? There's no one here but me, ma'am, and my ole man," said the woman, as she took the lady's parasol and hand bag and followed her slowly up the stairs.

"Then they have not come. But who are you, my good woman?" inquired Roma, as she paused on the landing and looked around the upper hall, a repetition of the lower one, except that, in place of great front and back doors, it had great front and back windows opening upon balconies.

"I, young mist'ess, why, I is Wilet, and my ole man is 'Rusalem. Yes, honey, dem's we. We's born here, honey, bofe of us, an' all our projeny 'fo' us. But we's de onlies' two as has stayed on faithful to de ole place, through frick an' frin! Ev'rybody 'mancipated de ole place, 'cept 'twas we! Eben ole Marse Henry Guyon! Eben he went an' 'mancipated de po' ole place to a low w'ite trash, named Tom Todd—Tom Todd!" she added, with infinite scorn. "But dis yere's your room, honey, an' it's been de bridle-chamber ob all de young Madam Guyons wot ebber was fotch here brides! But,

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Lors a me! you ain't a Madam Guyon, nor yet wasn't eben a Miss Guyon, as I hear tell! But I wishes you well, honey, I does, indeed! I wishes ob you well," concluded Violet—or Wilet, as everybody called her—as she opened a door and ushered her new mistress into a spacious front clamber, on the left side of the hall.

"Certainly, space was no object to those old builders," said Roma to herself, as she surveyed the large, square room, with its massive, old furniture.

The prevailing whiteness, snowiness of the place gave it a chilly aspect, notwithstanding the warmth of the blazing hickory wood fire in the white, freestone chimney-place.

The central figure was the great four-post bed, with its ample, white dimity draperies, trimmed with deep, netted white fringe, and looped and festooned in full folds, falling from the high tester to the floor.

Long, white, dimity curtains to match draped the four tall windows, two west and two south. The semi-circular toilet table, that stood between the two front windows, was draped with the like snowy dimity, and supported an antique dressing glass, above a box of drawers, and a portly, white cambric pincushion, much ruffled around the edges.

A large, comfortable easy-chair that stood before the fire was also covered with white dimity.

The polished yellow pine floor was bare, except four faded Turkey rugs—one before the fireplace, one before the dressing table and one on each side of the bed. The whitewashed walls were also bare but for a few dim, old pictures of Scripture subjects, almost faded out of identification.

But the fireplace was the most attractive feature of the room. It was broad and deep, and surmounted by a long, wide mantelpiece. Great hickory logs, all aflame, rested on the great, brass andirons rubbed to silvery brightness. A high, wire fender, with a bright, brass top, guarded the glowing fire and protected the room from accident by it.

On the mantelpiece stood two tall brass candlesticks

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holding lighted sperm candles. Between them hung a somewhat faded portrait, evidently executed by some traveling artist, of a fair Amazon that even in her dimmed luster showed a strong likeness to the radiant being who now stood gazing at it.

"Who is that?" inquired Roma, who recognized the likeness to herself.

"Dat honey—w'y, dat is Marse Henry Guyon's mudder. She wan'n't no home folks, yo' know. She come from way out yonder sumwhiz—de Isle ob Man! Yes, dat was it. De Isle ob Man! And dey do say as all de wimmen on de Isle ob Man is jes' as tall as de men is anywhuz else. And as for the men dere—dey is giants! But I dunno. All I do know is as Madam Verna Guyon was jes' de tallest, finest, handsomest lady I ebber sot my two lookin' eyes on, 'cept it was yourself, ma'am!"

"Thank you," said Roma with a smile.

"And sartin sure you do look like her."

"Well, I am her granddaughter. If I am not a Guyon, either by birth of by marriage, I am the child, the grandchild and the descendant of a long line of Guyons."

"And you has a good right to be proud ob your progeny, ma'am."

"My progenitors?"

"Yes, ma'am, dat's just what I meant to say—your prodigies! And you's a right to be proud ob dem. So you's de gran'darter ob dat lady dere?"

"Yes."

"Den you mus' be Miss Romaine's darter, 'cause dere was only de two ob dem—Marse Henry and Miss Romaine. Me an' my ole man we was fotch up long o' dem two, all chillans togadder. I 'members well de gran' weddin' was yere w'en Miss Romaine married dat young hossifer f'om Ole Point an' went 'way long ob him to de Debbil's Icy Peak sumwhuz."

"Yes, I am her daughter; but, ah! Wilet, I never knew her. She died when I was but a few days or hours old."

"See dat now! An' sich a handsome, young lady!

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Tall and fine, like you and her mudder, but not fair like you dem! Eyes and hair as black as night; cream-colored skin and lips like two 'rello cherries! Dat was her!"

Roma sighed, and then inquired:

"How came you to stay here after the colored people were all emancipated and even the master left?"

" 'Caze me an' my ole man was 'tach' to de ole place dat sooner'n 'manicipate it we 'greed to take sarvice 'long o' dat po' w'ite trash, Tom Todd—Tom Todd!" she repeated, in a tone of contempt and disgust.

"Why didn't you go with the old master when he went?"

"Wouldn't take us, honey. Couldn't fode it, I reckon. He goed to Richmon' and boded. No, honey, me an' my ole man we nebber would a 'mancipated old marse in dis worl', but he wouldn't hab us; so wot could we do but stay on to de ole place an' take sarvice long o' dat low w'ite herrin', Tom Todd—Tom Todd! Phe-ew! Glad enough was me an' my ole man w'en you come into yer own, honey, an' turned out Tom Todd and his pigpens too. An' w'en he lef', de agent g'eman wot was seein' arter fings yere for yer, he did 'gage me an' my ole man to stay on yere till yer come. But we'd stayed anyways, 'dout he puttin' in his mouf. But here am I talking, w'en I ought to be waiting on yer an' sarvin' yer. Now, wouldn't yer like some 'freshments, ma'am, dough it is late?"

"You may bring me a cup of tea, as I feel rather thirsty and tired," said Roma.

"An' nuffin' else?"

"No; nothing else."

The woman went away, and Roma took off her bonnet and mantle, laid them on a side table, and sat down in the deep, soft, white armchair before the fire, and sank back into it with a delicious sense of comfort and repose.

"Thank Heaven," she said, "that we have got rid of that intrusive bore at last. I thought we never should have done so," she said. "But it is time Will had re-

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turned from the boat, surely." She looked at her watch. It was after one o'clock.

A few minutes passed, and Wilet entered with a small Japan tea tray, on which was placed a little, old fashioned china teapot, with a sugar bowl of one pattern, a cream jug of another and a cup and saucer of still another. These were from broken sets of old china remaining at Guyon Hall. Besides the tea service, there was a plate of delicious wafer biscuits.

The woman drew a little stand up beside her mistress, and placed the waiter upon it, saying:

"The young marster say, ma'am, he wishes of yer to eat somefin'. And he says he will come up arter a w'ile."

"Oh! he has come back from seeing his friend off?"

"Yes, ma'am; an' he did meet me wid de waiter, an' tole me to set it down on de hall table an' go an' fetch some cakes or summut, an' he wishes ob yer to eat 'em long o' yer tea."

"I am only thirsty," said Roma, and she eagerly took the cup which the woman had filled for her. And afterward she drank a second cup of hyson, and then a third, for they were small.

"Yer was frusty, sho nuff," said Wilet, as she lifted the waiter to take it away. "Anyfing else I can do fer yer, ma'am? Help you to undress or anyfing?"

"No, thank you. I did expect to find my own maid here, but I suppose something has delayed her. I hope she will arrive to morrow."

"I could do anyfing any udder woman could."

"No, thank you; good-night," said Roma, who felt her eyes growing heavy.

"Good-night, ma'am," said Wilet, as she left the room, closing the door after her.

Roma sank back in her comfortable chair, to wait for the entrance of her husband. A delicious sense of benign repose stole over her; everything around her became dreamy and ideal—the vast, old-fashioned room, with its snowy draperies, the glowing hickory wood fire within, the muffled sound of the sea without —all seemed unreal, visionary, yet delightful. This

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calm, dreamy state passed into a perfect dream, then into dreamless sleep.

When Roma awoke she felt dizzy and bewildered. She did not know where she was or who she was. She was sitting in the large, white chair, before a smoldering fire of hickory wood, now burned down to a mass of red coals and black chunks, that cast a faint, lurid light on the sepulchral white draperies of the room. The candles on the mantelshelf had burned out. The room was almost dark.

Roma rubbed her eyes and looked around her.

She must have fallen asleep, and slept long, she said to herself, as the consciousness of her condition and surroundings dawned upon her.

She wondered if Will had come into the room, and, finding her asleep, had forborne to wake her, and had gone out again. She wondered what o'clock it was. It must be at least two or half-past two, she thought. She must have slept an hour or more. How strange!

She got up, feeling ill for the first time in her life. She went groping through the obscure room in search of matches and candles, but could find neither.

Then she groped her way to the chamber door and opened it.

Good heavens! She started back amazed and half blinded.

The hall was one blaze of light—not lamplight or candlelight, but daylight—sunlight. The morning was far advanced into noon. She must have slept all night and half the day, and no one had called her.

What did it all mean?

She hurried back into her room and threw open, one after the other, all the four windows, letting in floods of sunshine. Then she looked around the room. It was in perfect order; not a thing had been disturbed; evidently no one had entered it since the waiting woman had left it on the night before.

What could it mean?

She left her room and went downstairs.

She found the colored woman in the hall, dusting some furniture.

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"Good-mornin', ma'am. Breakfas' is ready for yer," said the latter.

"Where is your master?" inquired Roma.

"Marse William is in de parlor dere, ma'am," replied the woman, pointing to a door on the left.

Roma opened the door and entered the room, saw some one standing at one of the windows, with his back toward her. He turned to meet her. And she was confronted with William Hanson.

For an instant she stood aghast with astonishment, and then exclaimed:

"You here! Where is Mr. Harcourt?"

Hanson bowed, smiled and said:

"Mr. Harcourt returned in the boat to the steamer last night. By this time he is probably in Norfolk."

The amazed woman gazed in speechless consternation at the man.

"But he left a letter for you which will explain his absence. Here it is," he continued.

Roma took the letter as in a dream, and sank into a chair, demanding:

"Why did he go so suddenly? What urgent——"

"The letter will explain," Hanson said, interrupting her.

She opened it, still like one in a dream, and read:

"ROMA: You are the lawfully wedded wife of the man who will hand you this letter. He took the marriage license out in his own name and yours. He spoke to the officiating minister for himself and you. He took your hand in marriage; he, favored by the dim gaslight, put the ring on your finger. He signed the register as bridegroom, not witness, as he was supposed to have been. The marriage certificate is made out in his name and in yours. William Hanson is your lawful husband. I dare not ask you, I dare not ask God to pardon me, for I am the blackest criminal and the most accursed wretch on earth, or anywhere in the universe.

"WILL HARCOURT."

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CHAPTER XI

AT BAY

ANY woman less strong, resolute and self-possessed than Roma Fronde must have swooned or fallen into paroxysms of hysterical passion.

But not Roma. She was well named. No Roman maiden or Roman matron could have shown more firmness, constancy and self-command than she did in this astounding crisis in her fate.

She drew herself up to her full height, fixed her eyes sternly on the man's face and said:

"This letter is a forgery," and let it drop fluttering to her feet.

"By my soul, it is not! It is the genuine writing of William Harcourt. If that is a forgery, what, then, are these?" he inquired, placing the marriage license and the marriage certificate, both made out in the names of William Hanson and Romaine Fronde, open on the table under her eyes.

"More forgeries," she exclaimed, scornfully brushing them aside.

"You cannot say that with truth. There are the printed forms, there is the county seal attached by the county clerk to the license. There is the signature of the officiating minister to the certificate. Pray examine them for yourself," he said, drawing them beneath her eyes again; and again she put them aside, fixed her eyes steadily on his, and demanded:

"Where is Mr. Harcourt? Where is my husband? He went out with you, when you left the house to take the boat. He was to have come directly back. Where is he? What have you done with him? Or are you a murderer as well as a forger?"

"Mr. Harcourt is now in Richmond, or near that city. Your husband, Roma, stands before you, a suppliant for your forgiveness, and for your love. You doubt my words? Draw off your wedding ring, and see what is engraved within the circle," he pleaded.

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She took off the talisman and read: "William Hanson—Roma Fronde."

She deliberately threw the ring into the fire, but did not speak. She was intently thinking, intensely feeling, but she gave no sign.

Within herself she said:

"Here is some plot, which, to baffle, I must be 'wise as the serpent,' if not 'harmless as the dove.' I must be silent and attentive, and let this prince of villains talk and expose his villainy."

"Roma, will you permit me to explain?" he pleaded.

She bowed coldly, drew a chair and seated herself—she had been standing all this time—and composed herself to a calm, judicial attitude of attention, though her heart was caught in a grip of a terrible anxiety as to the fate of Will Harcourt. It was easy for Hanson, the trusted groomsman, to get the forms, and forge the license and certificate, easy for him to have the ring engraved with the false name, since it would not be produced until the marriage hour—so she could understand that part as possible; but—the suppression of Will Harcourt? What had Hanson done with him? Had he taken advantage of some sudden accession of Harcourt's illness, and surreptitiously shipped him off on the steamboat? Had he murdered him and sunk his body in the ocean? Roma's heart grew sick unto death at the thought, and yet she gave no sign of weakness.

He also took a chair and sat down, not too near to her. His manner and expression were deprecating, conciliating.

"Roma," he said, "will you listen to me patiently?"

She bowed silently, having determined to say as few words as possible.

"Roma, in speaking to you, I am a lawful and a loving husband speaking to his lawful and beloved wife. Will you believe this?"

She shook her head.

"Whether you do or not at present, you will when I get through. Long before this dark-eyed Southern boy fell under your notice I had met and I had loved

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you. From the time you were a little girl of fourteen springs, and used sometimes to come home with my sister, your classmate, to spend your holidays, I loved you, and longed for the time to come when I might tell you so, and you might understand me, for from the first moment I had ever seen you and loved you I resolved that, come what might, I would, when the right time should arrive, make you my wife. I was a society man, knew numbers of lovely and accomplished girls, and esteemed and admired some of them, but I loved only you. And I loved you with all my heart and soul. How could these words seem, Roma, to express the feeling that would have led me through fire and water to your feet! At length I met you in Washington. It was your first season. You had many admirers, many eligible suitors, I think. Yet you favored none of them, I was glad to see. Then I sued for your love. Then I laid myself, my fortune, and all my hopes of happiness, at your feet."

"And I thanked you for the intended honor, but declined it," said the lady, speaking at last.

"You did. But not the less strong was my resolution to make you my wife, in spite of all—a resolution I have now kept. Two summers later you met this weak boy—Harcourt. And you who had rejected some of the most distinguished men in the country——"

"Mr. William Hanson, for example," put in Roma.

"After but a few months' acquaintance, became engaged to marry him. You wrote to your bosom friend —my sister—announcing the fact. She told me. I nearly lost my senses when I heard it. I had met the fellow once or twice, yet had not noticed him; now I was resolved to seek him, and find out, if I could, what there was in him to fascinate the beautiful Amazon before whom the best men in the country had bowed in vain."

"Yourself, for instance," said Roma.

'I went to the Isle of Storms, where I had heard that he was sojourning—a guest, as I thought. Judge my surprise and—I must say, my disgust—when I found that the betrothed husband of the beautiful and ac-

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complished Roma Fronde was—the hotel clerk! I made his acquaintance. And I am constrained to say, Roma, that I was amazed and confounded by the discovery of your choice. What you ever could have seen in that dark, moody youth I cannot even conjecture."

"Perhaps," said the lady, surprised out of her reticence, "I saw in him the possibilities of a good and great man; but I do not know."

"He was but a youth, to begin with—only a few months older than yourself; and Shakespeare says 'a woman should always choose an elder than herself.' Besides, he was——"

"See here!" exclaimed the lady, interrupting him. "You have been so good as to remind me of men of wealth, intellect and position who have honored me with the offer of their hands, and expressed surprise that I should have declined them all in favor of a youth not remarkably endowed with any of these gifts. But, sir, I do not think that any woman really loves any man for his wealth, rank or fame, or even for his beauty, wisdom or goodness. She loves him because she loves him, nor could she give any other true reason if it were to save her soul alive."

She spoke with cool contempt, though inwardly tortured by anxiety for the fate of Harcourt, and watchful for some word that should give her a clew to it.

"Let that pass. The young man was unworthy of you, and I was resolved that, though you were engaged, he should not have you." Hanson paused, and glanced keenly at Roma; but she did not speak. She was eagerly listening for the clew she wished to catch.

"Chance favored me," continued Hanson. "I made a discovery which placed the life and honor of William Harcourt in my power. And with his life and honor, his aged mother's life and sanity, and in a manner even your reputation and happiness—all at my mercy."

Startled almost out of her self-command, Roma could scarcely control her impulse to spring up and

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stare in his face, to read there how much of truth or falsehood there might be in his statement. But she did control herself, and so she merely answered calmly:

"I cannot believe your theatrical utterances! Nothing but the discovery of a capital crime committed by him could place the life and honor of Will Harcourt at your mercy, and—Will Harcourt is utterly incapable of committing a crime. No, I do not believe you."

"Yet I have spoken the truth. He knew it to be the truth. He knew that his life and honor, and the vital interests of the two women he loved best in the world—his mother and yourself—were absolutely at my disposal. When I made this sufficiently clear to him, and made it the condition of my silence that he should give up his betrothed bride and help me to win her, he had no choice but to submit to the inevitable. Oh! it went hard with him! There were times when it seemed that he would bear all and dare all, rather than give up his betrothed! But when I represented to him, in rather vivid coloring, the shame and disgrace of a criminal trial and conviction, of a felon's garb in a State prison, or a felon's death on the gallows—well! even then, I think he would have dared and borne the worst rather than give up his beloved! But, finally, when I spoke to him of the last results—the widowed mother's broken heart, the betrothed bride's blighted life—then he yielded, consented to all I required, placed himself at my service."

Roma gazed at the speaker in consternation, with a growing conviction that he was speaking the truth, and with a blood-curdling suspicion as to his alleged discovery. The words burst from her unawares:

"You do not mean to hint that William Harcourt murdered Nathan Yelverton?"

Hanson gazed at her in silent astonishment that she should have come so near the facts; but she misunderstood his looks, and put a favorable construction on them. She thought he was amazed that she should have imagined such a thing! His next words set her mind completely at rest upon that point.

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"Why, no; of course not. No one 'murdered' Yelverton! He shot himself; that was indubitably proved on the coroner's inquest! Didn't you read the evidence? The room so secured from within that it had to be broken open? The pistol, clenched in the dead man's hand? The money, watch, diamond pin, and so on, all safe?"

"Oh, yes, I read it! But was not interested. What, then, in the name of Heaven, is the discovery of which you have spoken?"

"I must not tell you or anyone. It is Harcourt's secret. He bought it of me at a great price. Let me tell you instead how the feat was accomplished by which you became my wife, instead of Harcourt's. Shall I do so?"

With a mighty effort at self-command, she controlled herself and bowed in silence, reserving her words for a later time.

"It was all arranged between Harcourt and myself. No other creature was in the conspiracy. All I did was with his consent. As his groomsman I spoke to the minister, but I spoke not for Harcourt and you, but for myself and you. I got out the marriage license in my name and in yours. I had the wedding ring engraved with my name and yours. I wrote a marriage notice, to be inserted in this morning's paper in my name and in yours. The only really difficult part of the venture was in the church. I bribed the sexton—with a sum of money large enough to have bought his betters—to lower the gas at a given signal, making him believe that nothing more serious than an innocent practical joke against the wedding party was intended. At the moment the gas burned low, the parson, apparently thinking that something had temporarily gone wrong with the meter, would have paused and waited for the light to return; but I hurried him up, telling him that we had to catch the boat, and he proceeded with the ceremony. Under cover of the semi-darkness, it was I, William Hanson, who placed the wedding ring on your finger; it was I, 'William,' who vowed to take you, Roma, for my wedded

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wife, to have and to hold, etc., and you took me, 'William,' for your wedded husband. It was I, 'William,' and you, Roma, who were pronounced by the minister man and wife, until death should part us. When it came to signing the register, in the bad light, it was I who signed as husband and William Harcourt who signed as witness."

He paused and looked keenly at the imperial beauty whom he thought he had subjugated.

She sat now with her hands clasped and dropped upon her lap, her head proudly erect, her strong eyes gazing thoughtfully across the room into vacancy. He felt a little doubtful of her, a little afraid of her. He continued:

"Your quaint selection of the Isle of Storms as the scene of your honeymoon was highly favorable to the final success of my venture. We came here, arriving late at night. Under the pretext of escorting the bride and groom to the door of their new home, I came up to the house with you. Similarly, under pretense of seeing me back on board my boat, Harcourt walked with me to the pier. But it was Harcourt and not I who went on in the steamer, while it was I and not Harcourt who came back to the house. Harcourt is, by this time, in the city of Richmond. I, William Hanson, your husband, remain here. You did not believe me when I first told you these facts. But I think you believe them now," he said, glancing furtively on her.

She had not changed her position. She still sat with her hands clasped in her lap, her head erect, her gaze fixed on vacancy.

He went on:

"In order that you might have an undisturbed night's rest, I deferred the revelation of the truth until this morning. To insure you sleep, I put an opiate in your tea last night; you slept long and well, to judge by circumstances—all I have to judge by, since I never went near your room, for your privacy, Roma, was as sacred to me as that of a queen until I should have revealed myself to you as your lawful

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husband, and should have been acknowledged by you as such."

"I thank you for so much grace at least," came coldly from the lady's almost motionless lips.

He bowed and said:

"All that I have done, of good or evil, has been done for you, from an all-pervading, overwhelming, all-compelling love for you—a love——"

She lifted her hand in silent deprecation of further speech on that point, and he desisted and then said:

"Let us understand each other practically. It was said of an old king of England, a usurper of the throne, that though he gained the kingdom by fraud and violence, he nevertheless governed it with justice and moderation. Do you see the point? Though I have gained you for my wife by strategy, I will, for all that, and the more because of all that, be to you all that the most devoted lover and the most faithful husband can be. Though last night you were absolutely in my power, and I was madly in love with you, and had the lawful right to approach you, yet I respected your privacy. I never went near your room. Though you are absolutely in my power this morning and henceforth, on this remote and solitary island, cut off from all the world, unable to leave it without my consent and assistance, and having no companion but myself, though you are utterly at my mercy, yet, Roma, I am not a tyrant husband, not your 'lord and master,' not your jailer here, but I am your devoted lover, your humble suitor." He held his hands out to her. She shook her head.

"The social position that I offer you is equal to any ever laid at your feet by any other suitor, and immeasurably better than any Harcourt could have given you. For not only have I more wealth than I can possibly squander on town and country houses, on yachts, and hounds, and horses, but there is an English earldom in my family, an earldom that has been in abeyance for many years, but to which I am supposed to be the heir. Roma, you are not without social ambition! You know how to value the high,

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hereditary honors of this world! All these, with my love, with my life, I lay at your feet."

He paused and looked at her. She never moved nor spoke.

"Roma," he said, "why do you not speak to me?"

"I am waiting for you to finish your argument," she coldly replied.

"I have finished."

"Quite?"

"Quite. For the present, at least."

"Then, Mr. Hanson, I will answer you once for all. I deny your position—you are not my husband. You have no more legal right than moral claim to me. Your stolen position in the marriage ceremony, favored by darkness, gave you no right over me. Intention is the soul of the marriage vow; mine were intended to be given to William Harcourt, were given to him in spirit and in truth, not to you, whom I will never recognize as having any claim of any sort upon me," she said, and she arose to leave the room.

"But what will you do? You have no alternative?" he said, stopping her by a gesture, as she was about to pass.

"I am going to order the manservant to get the boat ready to take me across to Snowden. I shall go to the hotel, from which I will take a carriage to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Station, and so return to Goblin Hall and to the protection of my relatives," she answered, calmly.

"And next?"

"I shall consult the best legal authority to ascertain whether there is validity enough in the fraudulent marriage ceremony to make it necessary to appeal to the courts to have it annulled by law."

"And finally?"

"I shall send for Will Harcourt to come and defend himself from the shameful charge you have made against him. I am the victim of an artful plot. But I firmly believe it to have been made by you alone, without the concurrence of Harcourt."

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"You do? Then how do you account for his absence?"

"By some chicanery of yours—I know not what—but after the revelations—the confessions—you have made to me this day I can well believe you capable of any conspiracy, any treachery. Let me pass."

"Go and see what you can do, my lady," he said, and stood aside.

She went out of the room, and passed across the hall to a little parlor, where she rang the bell.

Wilet answered it.

"Send your husband to me immediately, and do you go and bring me a cup of coffee."

"Yes'm."

And the woman went to do her message.

In a few moments "Jerusalem" came in, bobbing, and holding his old felt hat in his hand.

"Jerusalem, I wish you to go and get the boat ready to take me across to Snowden."

"Gwine to Snowden, young mist'ess?"

"Yes."

"Dis mornin'?"

"Yes, immediately. Hurry."

"All right, young mis'ess; I go," replied the man; and he went.

Wilet came in with a cup of coffee and a piece of buttered toast.

Roma ate and drank in haste, and then telling Wilet to follow her, she went up to her room and began to pack a small traveling bag with such trifles as she might need on her journey.

"Why! Is yer gwine anywheres, young mist'ess?" inquired the woman.

"Yes; to Snowden," answered the young lady; but she did not think it necessary to give any further explanation.

She wrapped herself in her India shawl, put on her felt hat, drew on her gloves, picked up her traveling bag, and started down the stairs, followed by the wondering Wilet.

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In the hall below she found Jerusalem standing, scratching his head in perplexity.

"Is the boat ready?" she inquired.

"No mist'ess."

"How is that? Go and get it ready at once."

"Well, yer see, young mist'ess, de young marster he hab got de key ob de boathouse, and the boat chain, bof; and de boat is lock' up an' chain up bof in de boat-house."

"Well, go and ask for the keys, and get the boat ready as quickly as you can."

"I has ask' fo' de keys, young mist'ess, but yo' see' de young marster he won't gib 'em to me. He 'fuses ob dem. He say how de sea is too rough fo' a lady to wenter on; an' he say, he do, ef yo' will please to step inter de drawin' room how he'll 'splain to yer."

Roma started to rush thither, but stopped to combat the surging indignation that was throbbing through every vein and artery of her body.

When she had regained her self-command she crossed the hall, entered the room, stood calmly before Hanson, and said:

"Give me the keys to my boathouse and boat, if you please."

"But I do not please, my wife," he coolly replied.

"By what pretext do you dare to keep my keys, and refuse to give them to me when I ask for them?"

"Pretext!' By no mere pretext. By a husband's right. Let us understand each other, Roma. I am no ruffian. You need fear no violence from me; but, by Jove! after risking all I have risked to gain you —after such a desperate venture, and such a splendid success—I am not going to lose all the good of my daring, and lose you by letting you run away from me."

"Then I am a prisoner," she said, calmly.

He bowed and answered:

"Until you become my wife in reality, as you are in law; and until you become satisfied with the sweet bondage. And, moreover, Roma, you will have no communication with the outer world until that happy

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day shall arrive. I keep you an honorable and honored captive here that I may have the opportunity to woo and win your love. To prevent molestation by your mistaken friends, I shall permit no letter to leave that I have not previously read, nor will there be any opportunity for you to escape, or to send any letter that shall lead to your escape, for I intend to be the only letter carrier and messenger between the Isle of Storms and the outside world. I tell you this, Roma, not in triumph, and not in cruelty, but that you may recognize and resign yourself to your fate. In this matter of holding you fast on the island am I implacable; in all else I shall be your devoted lover, your faithful servant, your humble suitor," he said, and paused.

"Have you done?" she coldly inquired.

"Not quite. I wish to add that it has always been the impression of mankind that a man who would do desperate and well-nigh impossible deeds to win the woman he loved would be nearly sure to get her. Who has ever dared or done more for woman's love than I have done for yours?"

"Many," she answered, "and their deeds have been honorable, not disgraceful."

"The time will come, Roma, when you will recognize and reward my love."

"Never!" she exclaimed.

"I can wait and hope, so long as I have you here all to myself, without the possibility of your escape, or a rival's approach."

"Nevertheless I shall find means to escape," she said, proudly.

"What do you mean? That you will destroy yourself?"

A look of ineffable scorn replied to him, and then she added:

"No, you are not worth that. Not even as the easiest way of escaping from you would I break the law of God. I shall set my intelligence in a good cause against your cunning in an evil one. And I shall escape you yet."

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CHAPTER XII.

A SURPRISE

With these brave words she left the room and went upstairs to her own chamber.

She locked herself in and sat down in the white arm-chair to reflect on her position. It was serious enough, Heaven knows. On that solitary, sea-girt isle she was as much a prisoner as if she had been in a dungeon of the Bastile, or of the Chateau de l'Ile. She had no means of escape from the island, or of communication with her friends on the mainland. Her position was full of peril. For though Hanson, as yet, treated her with some show of respect, his forbearance could not be relied on.

But, full of danger and of possible horror as her present lot seemed, she could not concentrate her mind on any scheme of deliverance. Her thoughts would wander to Will Harcourt. Where was he, really? For how much or how little of the present state of things was he responsible? Of how much, indeed, might he or might he not be even cognizant? She could come to no conclusion.

He might have gone off in some fit of insanity, superinduced upon his imperfect convalescence from brain fever by some drug administered, or some other means used by the unscrupulous Hanson. Upon reflection, she felt sure that Hanson had not murdered him; not because he was not devil enough to do so, but because he was such a dainty, sensitive, smiling villain that he would have shrunk from any deed of violence, or any deed whatever that might have brought him into personal danger. His evil deeds would all be done by fraud and treachery, within the limits of the law, if possible—of security, in any case. It was from his cowardly fastidiousness and his ineffable vanity that Roma hoped for immunity from his too pressing attentions. The former would restrain him from present rudeness to her; the latter would

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inflate him with hopes of winning her sooner or later. His fastidiousness was constitutional; but for his vanity he was largely indebted to women of society, who smiled on him for his vast wealth, while he believed they were captivated by his personal attractions; and as to himself, he had certainly told Roma one truth—he had never loved one of them—had never loved before he met Roma, and he loved her with all the little soul he had. Hanson was not a monster, but a demon, not a Minotaur, but a Belial—though a very devil of that order. Roma gauged him, and so hoped for temporary immunity from his too urgent attention. But how long would this security last? And if the creature should drink? He was not intemperate, but a single glass of wine, which he seldom touched, would go to his head. She had noticed that, even in her childhood, while on a visit to his sister.

She felt that she must devise some means of escape—but how? but how?

She thought of the fishermen squatters on the island. She arose and rang her bell.

Wilet came to the door.

She let her in and locked the door. It once occurred to her to trust her troubles to the warm-hearted colored woman who had been maid to her mother; but she dismissed the thought. If she should make confidants and co-conspirators of her colored people, Hanson would be sure to find it out, however guarded those simple folks might be, and by some treacherous device would deprive her of their services. No, she would not tell them her situation—at least, not yet.

"Aunty, sit down. Save your back all you can at your age," Roma said, laying her hand on a chair.

"Not 'fo' you, young mist'ess. I knows my place too well for dat lib'ty," said Wilet, folding her fat arms over her ample bosom and dropping a courtesy.

"I think, aunty, that an elder woman might sit in the presence of a younger one," said the lady; but seeing that Wilet was certainly more at her ease in

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her accustomed attitude under the circumstances, she said no more on the subject, but inquired:

"Who are the fishermen that live on the island, aunty? I sent for you to tell me all about them."

"Lor', young mist'ess, dere nebber ain't none yere at this season," Wilet answered.

"None?" repeated Roma, with a look of disappointment.

"Not one, honey."

"Are they here only in the spring, or the summer? Tell me about them."

"Well, you see, honey, you see, dey's mighty wile, unsettle sort ob creeturs, 'mines me mo' ob wile geese an' wile turkeys wot comes an' goes 'cordin' to de season, dan 'sponsible human people. Dey comes yere sometimes as airly as de middle ob Feberrary, an' dey stays till de middle ob Nowember. Dis year de las' ob 'em went 'way, bag an' baggage, de very day you come. Dey went in de mornin', you come at night."

"Where do they go?"

"Now, de Lord knows, but I don't. Long as I hab libbed on dis islan', an' dat's all my life—'caze I was born so, an' all my prodigies fo' me—I nebber did know whey dey come f'om. Dey comes yere an' libs half ob de year an' mo', an' dey fishes an' packs fish an' sen's it 'way, an' makes lots ob money, in coorse, but nebber had to pay one cent to de marster ob de place. Why, Lor'! old Marse Harry Guyon nor his prodigies would nebber no mo' t'ought ob axin' dem po' people to pay, nor dey would ob thought ob any udder meanness. But, honey, people do hab diffiunt ways ob lookin' at fings. Now, I hear young marse downstairs say to 'Rusalem—No wunner, he say, de Guyons did come to poverty w'en dey was so wasteful ob deir property, he say, an' how nex' year dem fisher people should pay—— Now, Lord 'a' messy upon me, w'y can't I fink ob dat big word——"

"Rent?"

"Lor', no, honey! Not a po' trash word like dat!

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It were a big, soundorious moufful ob a word. Les see, now; Row—row—row——"

"Royalty?" suggested Roma.

"Dat was it! Rowalty! Dey should pay a rowalty!"

"Then they shall not, as long as I live and the island is mine."

"Dat's you', honey! You stick at dat! Hab yo' own way long o' yo' own prop'ty. 'Bey yer husban' is all berry well—on 'casions, w'en it's 'gree ble so to do! But Lors, dem men! Dey ain't to be trusted. I take notice I nebber heerd ob our Lord gibbin' sich a order, an' as for de Possil Paul, he spoke ob Chrisen wives an' husban's, an' nebber did mean as wimmen was to 'bey foolish or wicked men. W'y, Lor', chile, dere's my 'Rusalem. He's well 'nough fer a po' innercen', he creetur', but Lor', if I allers beyed him, an' let him do as he please whey would we be now, I like to know? No, honey, keep de men in deir proper place, dat's what I say," concluded Wilet, folding her arms a little more closely, as if hugging her theories.

"Aunty," said Roma, to get back to the former question, "are there any people besides ourselves living on the island?"

"Why, Lor', no! cert'ny not. Not a libbin' soul at dis present time, 'cept 'tis you an' young marse, an' me an' 'Rusalem.

"'Us fo'
No mo','

as de ole rhyme go. An' dat min's me to say, young mist'ess, as we hasn't too much work to do. An' so you no call to lighten mine, by makin' up yer own bed, and tidyin' up yer own room. Why, honey, I nebber heerd ob a Guyon makin' up a bed. I was s'prised to see how well you done it, w'ea I come in dis mornin'. An' I do s'pose as yer de werry fuss ob yer prodigies that ebber did it. Dey nebber did no work, chile."

"Then I do not think any the more of them on that

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account. You say there is no one on the island but ourselves?"

"Us fo', no mo'; 'cept 'tis de animyles."

"Any boats?"

"On'y t'ree lock' up in de boathouse, and young marse keep de key."

"Aunty, you must have been very lonesome in the winter, living here with no one but your husband."

"Lonesome? Oh, I jes' tell yer! Don't talk, honey! Lonesome, oh!"

"How did you get things when you wanted them?"

"'Rusalem always took a boat an' went cross to Snowd'n."

"Did you go often?"

"Oh, no, ma'am. Not offen; 'twasn' offen safe so to do. 'Rusalem, he'd make baskets an' mats, an' I'd knit stockin's an' socks; an' 'bout once a monf he'd take 'em cross to Snowd'n an' change 'em at de sto' fo' tea an' coffee, an' sugar, an' sich, an' specially for lucifers."

"Why specially 'lucifers'?"

"Lor', chile! S'pose de fire was to go out in de night, an' no lucifers? We'd freeze to deaf fo' we could get 'em f'om Snowd'n."

"I see. Well, aunty, have you time to take a little walk with me? I wish to see something of this little kingdom of mine."

"Yes, honey, plenty. I'll jes' go and set 'Rusalem to 'tendin' to de dinner, an' den come up an' wait on yo'. An' yo' wrap yo'se'f up warm, honey, fo' it's sharp an' cole walkin' on de Snake's Back. Whe-ew! I tell yo'!" said Wilet, and she left the room.

Roma put on her heavy India shawl, tied a fur bonnet on her head and under her chin, drew on furred gloves, and went downstairs to the lower hall, where she waited for Wilet to join her. An open door on her right gave a view of a cozy, not to say a luxurious, interior. Before a glowing, open fire, and in a comfortable reclining chair, lay William Hanson, wrapped in a rich cashmere dressing gown, a cigarette between his lips, a French novel in his hand,

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while on a little stand beside him stood a steaming pot of chocolate and a tiny china cup.

"Upon my soul, the usurper makes himself at home in my house!" was the indignant mental commentary of the lady as she looked on the scene.

But she was soon joined by Wilet, in a large tartan shawl and a wadded black silk hood.

They left the house by the front door.

And then for the first time the scenery of the Serpent Isle burst upon her view.

The mansion stood upon the summit of a round, rocky hill, about a hundred feet above the level of the sea, carrying out the idea of the serpent by forming its head. Against the rocks below the sea raged, thundered and broke with deafening uproar.

Roma, surprised, startled, wondered that she had not heard this storm of sound even through the thickness of the walls inside.

"Yo' can't go no furder dis way, young mist'ess. De tide's in, an' de waves come smack up 'gin de rocks. We has to turn an' walk all de way down on de ridge till we gits to de Wanishin' P'int, ef yo' likes to go so far."

They turned to the left, and went around by a path through the sere shrubberies to the rear of the mansion, and began to descend the hill to a narrow strip of land that united it, like a neck, to the long, winding body of the island. Passing over, they began to ascend the ridge.

"Now, young mist'ess, I wants you to notice dis, ef yo' please, ma'am. How dis islan' do mos' truly signify de sarpin'! Dere's de head whey de house stan', an' dere's de neck we's jes' crossed, an' yere's de backbone we's a-walkin' on. An' it turns an' wines in and out, till we comes down to de tail wid de Wanishin' P'int, 'case when de tide is out de sans down dere go finer an' finer, an' till you' hardly know w'en dey dis'pears. Dough w'en de tide is in an' de waves come up to de rocks, it do mine me ob de rattles at de end ob de rattlesnake's tail. Yes, ma'am!"

Roma listened, but she was looking to the right

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and left of that part of the ridge on which they stood —on the old orchards, old vineyards, stubble fields, barns and cattle pens, and other vestiges of a once well-kept and prosperous farm—and she was forming a resolution to restore it to its former state, and to make the farm as much finer than it had ever been in its best days as agricultural science was higher now than it had been in the time of the Guyons.

"Dere's de po' fishermen's huts," said Wilet, when they had gone on a little further, pointing to a collection of wooden shanties about halfway down the ridge.

"Are these all?" inquired Roma, looking with interest upon these little nests of human seabirds, which had no hint of home about them, not a garden, not even a tree or plant, not a yard, nor an outhouse, with no sign of ever having been inhabited, unless fragments of old nets, bits of rope and a broken oar or two, lying scattered on the ground, might be taken as such.

"Lor', no, honey, dem ain't all; dere's some more on t'other side, furder down. An' dere's some on de rattles. Lor', how dis islan' is like a snake, anny-how! 'Deed, honey, dere is times w'en I mos' finks as dis mus' 'a' been a rale, libe sea sarpin', in de ole time, w'en dere was giants in dose days, an' dis yere fing was a sea sarpin' giant, an' died an' come to be a islan'. 'Deed, it do seem so to me."

"It is a quaint fancy," replied Roma.

They walked on, winding east and west with the turning of the serpent, until they came to the Rattle. The tide was so high that it was just on the turn. The Rattles were piles of loose rocks, at the extreme end of the island, which narrowed there to a point of sand at the foot of them.

Roma and her attendant stood upon one, at a safe distance from the waves. But as the sea dashed among the lower ones, Wilet said:

"Now, don't that sound just like the rattle of the rattlesnake, young mist'ess?"

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"Rather louder, I think," replied Roma, smiling at the conceit.

"Louder? W'y, course it's louder! 'Cause de sea sarpin' is bigger. De rattle's ebber so much louder, 'caze de sarpin's ebber so much bigger!"

"Ah, that accounts for it! We will go home now," said Roma, turning to retrace their steps.

It was past noon when they reached the house. As Roma went through the hall she saw again, through the open door of the parlor, William Hanson luxuriating in his dressing gown and armchair, with his cigarette between his lips, his French novel in his hand, and his pot of chocolate and china cup on the stand by his side; and in her rising indignation she longed for the power to transform the epicurean into a convict in a striped suit, with a pickax in his hand, at work in the quarries of some State prison.

"Ah! the worst of the sinner's sin is the evil state it puts me in!" she said to herself, as she went up to her room.

She found 'Rusalem there, putting pine and cedar logs on the open fire.

"I'se fotch yo' dese, young mist'ess, caze dey smells so sweet w'en dey's burnin'; w'ich likewise dey's so healfy, also," he explained, as he adjusted his last log, took the hearth brush and swept up the ashes.

"Uncle," she said, "do you ever go across to Snowden?"

"Oh, yes, young mist'ess; frequent."

"Then the next time you go, will you let me know?"

"Sartain, ma'am."

"Because I would like to send a letter by you; but I do not wish you to let anyone know about the letter."

"No, ma'am; I won't, sure," he answered, looking a little surprised at the conditions.

"Uncle," she said again, "do you think it would be possible for you to get a boat out at night, some time, and take me across to Snowden?"

The old man looked astonished at the proposition, shook his head, and answered:

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"Young mist'ess, I would do anyfing in dis worl' for yo' as was possible; but dat dere ain't possible, an' I tell yo' w'y. Young mars'e' won't lemmy go by mysel'. On'y dis wery fuss day I ax him to leave me go an' get some ile for de tools, an' I wanted some 'bacca for mese'f; but he say to me, he say:

" 'Ole man, I shall be goin' to Snowden in a few days, and will do yo' erran' fo' yo'. But I can't trust yo, to go alone. Yo' might upset the boat an' drown yo'se'f'. Me upset the boat an' drown myse'f, w'en I'se been boatin' all my life, an' nebber did sich a fing!"

Roma made no reply. She saw how her prison bonds were being tightened about her. She doubted even the possibility of being able to send a letter at any time by the negro man; for she felt sure that Hanson would be so suspicious and so cautious that he would never allow 'Rusalem to mail a letter, or even drop one on the ground for some chance passer-by to pick up and post.

"Anyfing on dis yeth as I can do fo' yo', young mist'ess, I will wid de greatest ob pleasures," said 'Rusalem, as he stood waiting for further commands.

"I am sure you will. Thank you; that will do. You may go now," said Roma, gently.

The old man bowed and left the room.

For the first time on that dreadful day Roma's courage failed. She bowed her head on her hands in a collapse of despair.

Alone on the sea-girt island, in the power, at the mercy, of an unprincipled villain, without the means of escape, or of letting her friends know her desperate condition.

"Heaven have mercy on me!" she breathed, "for there is no help in man!"

A soft, low note, a coo, a wail, as of sorrow or sympathy, melted melodiously on her ear.

Where did it come from? It seemed supernatural —a spirit cry. Yet, in her absorbed misery, she might not have noticed it had it not been such a perfect utterance of her own bereaved, homesick, despairing

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desolation, and at the same time such a response to it.

The note came again—low, sweet, soft and ineffably mournful.

Great thrills of joy shook her frame, as if her life were throbbing out with it.

It was the carrier pigeon mourning, calling for his mate far away in Goblin Hall among the hills.

She had taken the boy's present with indifference, had scarcely looked at it, indeed, and in the extremity of her fortunes had forgotten all about it. Now she started to her feet.

"Oh, Abbot!" she cried, "how little did you know, or I foresee, that in this bird you gave me a gift more precious than a crown of diamonds. You gave deliverance, salvation!"

The low, sweet, soft, infinitely mournful note melted as on her ear again.

"Yes, my darling of darlings," she said, going to the cage, "I know all about it. In every fiber of my heart I feel it all. I, too, am in captivity, away from all I love. I, too, am homesick and despairing. Your sorrows come home to my bosom, poor bird. And you shall go, dear bird. You shall go right away to your mate. You shall start before the sun sets, your eyes see her before the moon rises. I will deliver you, and you shall deliver me!"

The cage sat in a dark corner. The bird hopped down from his perch, turned his head on one side and looked up at her. She had forgotten him; he had been utterly neglected. Food and water had not been placed that day in his cage by the hands of any one of the servants. Roma was glad of that. He was the fitter for his errand. She cooed to him, talked to him and chirped to him, and tried to infuse hope and gladness into his mourning heart that might sustain him while she should make her preparations. She thought she had succeeded, and that he understood a purpose in her words, "if not the words."

From her writing desk she took a piece of thin paper, and wrote:

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"I am here on the Isle of Storms, in good health, but in deadly peril. Come and rescue me as soon as possible. "ROMA."

She folded this note and directed it to "Mrs. Ruth Elde, Goblin Hall." Again she folded it in as small and flat a compass as she could.

Then she took the pigeon from his cage, caressed him and petted him, and fastened the note carefully under the edge of his right wing. The eager restlessness of the bird seemed to indicate that he knew he was to be sent home. When she had securely fastened the note, and flattened it against his wing, she smoothed down his ruffled feathers, put his beak to her lips and kissed him; then she opened the western window, and said:

"Go, my angel of deliverance. Noah, who must have been the first trainer of carrier pigeons, never sent forth his dove with more of hope and prayer than I send with you. Do not bring back an olive branch, but send a scourge of fire."

She held the bird out, and opened her hand.

He darted away, but alighted on the top of a leafless oak tree.

She watched him eagerly, prayerfully. He spread his wings and rose in the air again, but only circled around and around the tree, enlarging the circles at every sweep. And then he suddenly rose to an immense height, and darted off in a straight line to the northwest, until he sailed out of sight.

What a wonderful thing! He has taken a bee line to Goblin Hall! Thank Heaven! I thought he would. But will he get there? Yes, he has started right, after many circles; but he did not take flight until he had found the right course, and the further he flies in that direction the nearer he will be to his goal and the surer he will be to find it. The books say that the carrier pigeon will fly forty miles in half an hour. At that rate, he will reach his destination by set of sun, if he can fly so far. But he has never attempted any flight half so long."

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And then she began to think of the record of this same pigeon—of how, two or three years ago, Mr. Gray, of Wheatlands, had given Abbot a pair of carrier pigeons brought from Persia, and how, in the course of time, the female bird had deposited two little eggs in her nest, which duly produced the young pair of which this one was the male.

She remembered the careful way in which the boys had trained him when he was able to fly; how they took him a little way from his nest, let him loose, and hid themselves to watch over his safety until he flew back to his nest; how each succeeding day they took him further from home, let him loose, and watched his return. So they trained him carefully by book, increasing the distance of his daily flight until one memorable day, when they took him as far as Wheatlands, wrote a little note to their mother at Goblin Hall, tied it under his wing, and set him free; how he had darted off in a bee line for his home; how, fast as they rode back, they found him there long before them.

Roma remembered all this now, and wondered how little she had cared for it at the time, or thought of the pigeon being the precious carrier when Abbot had given it to her as a wedding present. Ah! how little either thought of all that gift would be to her! But, more than all, she wondered at the miracle of the carrier pigeon himself. She recalled the words of the natural historian:

"By what chart it is guided in its unerring flight is one of the marvels of instinctive reasoning."

But could this pigeon fly so far, over land and water, hills and plains, as finally to reach Goblin Hall in safety?

That was again the troubling question. If he could do so, then he would reach his goal by sunset. Then the boys would receive him and find the note.

How they all would wonder and speculate! But wonder and speculation would not delay their action. Some one would instantly set out to her relief. Thank Heaven, she thought, there was nothing to prevent

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a visitor being landed from a boat, sent from Snowden to the isle.

CHAPTER XIII

ANOTHER WEDDING

When the small party of friends had seen the bride and bridegroom off, they returned to their several temporary homes.

At their hotel, Mrs. Elde and Mrs. Harcourt found letters waiting for them.

Mrs. Elde's correspondence was not in any way important.

Mrs. Harcourt's solitary letter demanded immediate attention. It bore the Logwood postmark.

It was as follows:

"Lone Lodge, West Virginia,
"November 15, 187—.

"My Dear Madam: I feel sorry to be the medium of ill news; but I write at the request of your faithful old servant, Moses Meadows, who is lying very ill with pleuro-pneumonia. Dr. Knott, of Logwood, is attending him, and mamma and myself are doing all that we can for him; but he thinks that he is going to die, and he wishes earnestly to see you, as he says he has something of the utmost importance to communicate to you before he leaves this world. This may be the mere delusion of fever. It is for you, dear madam, to judge. With regards from all our family, I remain,

"Respectfully yours,
"Margaret Wynthrop."

Having finished the perusal of this letter, Mrs. Harcourt passed it in silence to Mrs. Elde.

"Who is Margaret Wynthrop? And who is Moses Meadows?"

"The young lady is the eldest daughter of Mr. Silas

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Wynthrop, who is the present proprietor of Lone Lodge. The old man is a family servant, who, with his wife, Martha, has remained faithful to my son and myself through all our misfortunes. Now, you see, my dear, I must go home at once," said Mrs. Harcourt, decisively, and without a moment's hesitation.

"I am so very sorry; so very much disappointed. I did think you would return with us to Goblin Hall, and stay until Will and Roma should come back to take up their residence there, and then—not go away, but settle yourself with them for good," said Ruth, regretfully.

"Thank you, dear, you are very kind. I, too, am disappointed, or should be if every other feeling were not now lost in one of anxiety about my poor old servant. When does the next train start for West Virginia, do you know?"

"I will send for a time-table and see," replied Ruth; and she rang and gave the message to the porter who answered her bell.

"Do you really think that the old man has any secret of moment to tell you?" inquired Ruth.

"Yes, I think he has. I have thought for a long time that Moses had something on his mind which he longed yet dreaded to confess to me," replied the old gentlewoman.

"Do you think it was a crime?" inquired Mrs. Elde, startled by the word "confess."

"A crime! No, indeed. Moses is quite incapable of anything even remotely approaching crime. I never knew a man more honest and truthful in all his words and deeds, or more charitable and forbearing in his temper; so, you see, crime is quite impossible to him. Yet I feel sure he has something on his mind that troubles his tender conscience," replied the old lady.

The entrance of the porter with the time-table stopped the conversation.

Mrs. Elde took the pamphlet, turned to the proper page, and examined it. Then she said:

"There is a train leaves here at twelve-thirty."

"And it is now eleven o'clock. I have just an hour

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and a half to pack up, and that will be quite sufficient. But look, my dear, and see if that train stops at Logwood."

"Yes, it does," said Ruth, who had been running her eye across the page. "It is the slow train, and stops at every station.

"When will it arrive at Logwood?"

"At an unearthly hour, which is neither day nor night—at 2:50 A. M."

"Thank you, dear. Now I will go and pack up," said the old lady, rising to leave the room.

"But, my dear Mrs. Harcourt, you cannot go by that train," said Ruth, in dismay.

"Why not?" calmly inquired Dorothy Harcourt.

"You cannot go on a long railway journey of fifteen hours, ten of them at night, and arrive at a little way station in the mountains alone, unattended, at about three o'clock, in the dark."

"My dear, there is no danger. My fellow travelers, though they may be strangers, are human beings, and will not let me suffer harm. When I reach Logwood I shall be sure to see some one I know, for I am acquainted with all the men employed at that station, and have been since their childhood. They are all Logwood people. Besides, if there were the greatest danger, instead of none at all, I should go all the same. The summons from a dying man, especially when he is an old and faithful servant, must not be disregarded. Excuse me now, dear. I must really go and pack my trunk," said Dorothy Harcourt.

"Well, I am sorry. I can do no more. I will have luncheon ready for you in this room at twelve o'clock, and the carriage ordered at twenty minutes past. It will only take us five minutes to drive to the depot," said Ruth.

"Thank you, dear. You are very good," said the old gentlewoman, as she left the room.

Ruth Elde was quite alone. Her boys, under the charge of their tutor, had gone to the Smithsonian Institute, to improve their minds. They were expected

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to be absent all day, and return only for the six o'clock dinner.

Ruth rang the bell and brought the porter to the door.

"Go to the head waiter and order dinner for two at twelve sharp."

The man stared and wondered. This lady was a queer guest. She had ordered breakfast at the beastly hour of five o'clock in the morning, and now she ordered dinner at noon.

"Would you please, ma'am, to write the order, so as there may be no mistake?" said the man, producing from his pocket tablets and a pencil.

Ruth laughed, and wrote the menu—soup, fish, roast fowl, cabinet pudding, oranges, coffee—an left all minor details to the direction of the head waiter.

The man took the paper and turned to leave the room.

"One moment!" she said, raising her hand.

The man paused.

"Tell the head waiter to prepare the best lunch for one lady going off by the train, and send it up with the dinner."

The man bowed and went out.

"Yes, a hot dinner is just what that dear old lady will need to start her on that long journey, and a substantial lunch to take with her," she reflected. And then she took up the *Republican*, and turned, as was her custom, first to the marriage notices.

She started as her eyes fell on the announcement of the marriage of that early morning, which William Hanson, with devilish cunning, had left at the office of the paper on the evening previous, to be published in this morning's edition.

"Why, this is much 'too previous!'" she exclaimed. "This is 'indecent haste' indeed! The notice must have been in type before the ceremony was performed. I wonder who did it. Hanson, of course—that busybody! He did just everything. But, good gracious!" she cried out, as she read the notice which she had first only seen. "What is this? 'Hanson-Fronde!'

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Hanson? What a horrible stupid mistake! Somebody ought to be hanged for it!" Then she read:

"'HANSON-FRONDE. On Tuesday morning, November 15th, at the Church of the Heavenly Hope, by the Rev. Dr. Truman, William Hanson, of New York City, to Romaine, daughter of the late Gen. Everard Fronde, of Goeberlin, Maryland.'"

"This passes all belief! It is somebody's practical joke. If so, it should be severely punished. And it must be so! It cannot be a printer's error. If it were only the name of the bridegroom got wrong it might be explained by the similarity of the names, William Harcourt and William Hanson; but 'of New York!' No, it is not a mere mistake, nor is it a mere practical joke; it is an insolent, hideous, malignant deed of some enemy, who should be punished severely to the full extent of the law—if there be any law to punish such fiends. And who could it have been? What enemies have we? Well, I do think while Will's groomsman was making himself so very busy about everything else, he might have attended to the marriage notice, and then this horrid thing would not have happened. I wonder if any of the papers have got it right?" she asked herself.

And she immediately began to hunt the columns of the *Morning Star* and the *Post*, and each one had published the marriage of William Hanson, of New York, to Romaine Fronde, of Maryland.

"This is beyond all endurance, and embarrassing beyond all measure. What a ridiculous position it will put us all in to attempt to set it right. To get all these papers to contradict the notice on the subject, to explain that it was all wrong, that it was not Mr. Hanson, of New York, but Mr. Harcourt, of Virginia, that Miss Fronde, of Maryland, married. Oh! oh! I shall die of mortification! And the young couple—how naturally humiliated and furious they will feel when they hear of it. What can be done?

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I must consult Joe. He is a tower of strength to me."

The entrance of the waiter with a tablecloth over his arm interrupted the angry current of her thought. He began to set the table. Before he had finished, Mrs. Harcourt entered, dressed for her journey, with the exception of her bonnet and shawl, which she brought in her hand and laid down with her hand bag on the sofa. Ruth said:

"You are an expeditious packer," and she drew forward the easiest chair in the room for the old lady to rest in.

"There was but little to pack, my dear," replied Mrs. Harcourt, as she sank into her seat.

Ruth gathered up the papers as slyly as she could, and put them out of sight. She did not wish to distress the aged gentlewoman with the knowledge of that "absurd and malignant marriage notice," as she mentally called it.

The waiter brought in the soup. The two ladies sat down to the table.

"A hot lunch," said Mrs. Harcourt, as she received a plate of soup from Ruth.

"A hot dinner. We breakfasted so very early that we are both quite ready for it, I think, and it will be the best support to you on your journey," said Ruth.

"You are very good to me, my dear. But where are the boys?"

"Gone with their tutor to the Smithsonian Institute, where they are going to spend the day."

"Ah, well, give my love to the lads, and say good-by for me."

"I will. They will be disappointed, but I hope you will come to see us just as soon as—as you can."

"I shall come with pleasure, my dear. If old Moses should recover, I can safely leave him with his wife, Martha. If he should die, which may Heaven forbid, I shall bring Martha with me to Goblin Hall, if you have no objection. She has always been my personal attendant."

"Why, my dear Mrs. Harcourt, of course I shall be

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pleased to have you bring her, or anyone, or as many as you please; besides, you know, the house belongs to your daughter-in-law, and she and her husband expect you to make your home with them."

The waiter came in to remove the soup.

"Will you give orders downstairs for some one to take this lady's luggage to the carriage that waits for us?" said Mrs. Elde.

The man bowed.

"Room 333," added Mrs. Harcourt.

The man bowed again and went out with a laden waiter.

He came in several times, changing the courses.

"The carriage is ready, ma'am," he said, as he placed the coffee service on the table.

Mrs. Harcourt and Mrs. Elde hastily drank a cupful each, and then rose to put on their bonnets and wraps.

In five minutes they were in the carriage and on their way to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Depot.

"You have a splendid day for your journey," said Ruth, as the carriage drew up at the station.

"Yes, thank Heaven. I wonder where our bridal pair are by this time?" suggested Mrs. Harcourt, as she alighted from the carriage.

"Twelve-twenty-six—oh, they must be now about opposite Piney Point," Ruth replied, as she gave the lady her arm and led her into the waiting room.

They had but just time to get her ticket and check her trunk and hurry to the train.

Ruth saw her old friend comfortably seated in a drawing-room car, and waved her a hasty good-by as the train moved out of the depot. Ruth returned to her carriage and gave the order: "Back to the hotel.

"I am glad she did not know about that marriage notice. I hope she will not see any of to-day's Washington papers. Oh, I hope no officious fellow passenger will offer her one! Oh, I wish I could have got hold of her spectacles and hidden them! Well, I must trust in Providence," she said, as the carriage bowled along up the avenue.

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When she reached her room, she found Mr. Gray waiting for her.

"Oh, Joe!" she said. "I am so glad to find you here!"

She was only thinking of that offensive marriage notice, upon which she wished to consult him.

"And I am glad to come, especially as I bring good news. When I reached my hotel this morning I found waiting for me the long-expected document appointing me Consul to Delfcome."

"Oh, indeed, I am so glad. I congratulate you with all my soul. When are you to go?"

"Immediately—that is, I mean in a very few days, so as to enter on my official duties on the first of December."

"Are you sure you must leave so soon?"

"Why, of course, I am. The first thing I did after receiving the appointment was to wait on the secretary and ascertain the facts. And now, Ruth, my dear, you know what we agreed upon—that, if I should receive this appointment, we would get married at once, so as to go abroad together with our boys and girls."

"Yes; but this is so much more sudden than ever I bargained for. You said you must go immediately —that is, in a few days. Now, how many days? What day do you think of sailing?"

"I have not settled that. I wished to consult you first. Now, then, let us see. I must be in Delfcome on the first of December, the day on which the present consul's resignation takes effect. This is the fifteenth of November. It will take eight days to cross the ocean, and may take nine. To make sure, we ought to sail on the twentieth, which is Saturday, and certainly we should not delay longer than Monday, the twenty-second. What preparations have you got to make, my dear?"

"What preparations, indeed! I have got to go to Goblin Hall and pack up my own and my boys' winter wardrobes, which were all left there when we came

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away on our summer tour, which has been extended half through the autumn."

"I, too, have got to run down to Wheatlands to 'set my house in order,' as well as I can on short notice. I can manage to do this in two days, I think. Drake, my overseer, in whose charge I shall leave the place, is an honest, intelligent fellow, so I can leave a good deal to his discretion. How long will it take you to finish what you will have to do at Goblin Hall?"

"Oh, it will take me three days, at least. And I shall have to write to Roma and Will Harcourt to come on there at once. The place has been left too long to the servants, and must not be so neglected any longer."

"Then we must fix Monday for our day of sailing. I will telegraph at once to the agents and secure three staterooms for our party. Shall you take a maid?"

"Maid on a sea voyage! Not if I retain my senses. My friends' experience is that the maid is always sea-sick, and the mistress has to nurse her. I never tried the experiment myself, and do not intend to do so."

"Quite right. Well, my dear, I am going now to telegraph the agent, when I shall bring a couple of carriages—one for you and myself and one for our four children. And if you will be ready we will drive quietly to Dr. Truman's parsonage and get the knot tied that will unite two in law who are already united in affection. And to-night we will take the train for Goeberlin and reach home by noon to-morrow, to begin setting our houses in order before sailing. On Saturday morning we can leave for New York and reach there in ample time to secure our passage. What do you say, Ruth?"

"I say that, if in the discharge of your official duties you should exhibit the same promptitude and executive ability, you will be likely to hold office as long as the Vicar of Bray, no matter what political party may be in power. But you are far too rapid and energetic for me, Joe. I can't keep up with you. You take away my breath."

"Oh, come, now, Ruth, dear, you are surely above

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all womanish affectations. Let us go and get married and set about preparing for our sudden voyage," said Mr. Gray, urgently.

"You have not got any license," objected the lady.

"Oh, yes, I have! I have got one in my pocket at this present moment. I went straight from the state department to the city hall and took it out."

"Well, upon my word!" exclaimed the widow, in some surprise and some feigned indignation.

The member from Maryland understood her, and answered:

"You see, my dear, there was no time to lose then, and there is less time to lose now, for time is passing rapidly. Come, I am off to send the telegram and order the carriages. You will be ready when I return?"

"How can I, Joe? My boys are at the Smithsonian with their tutor."

"We will call and pick them up on our way to church. The institute is right on our road. Consider the exigency of the case, Ruth, dear, and hurry up," said Mrs. Elde's lover, as he himself hurried out.

The pretty widow stood transfixed for a few moments. This crisis was really nothing more than she might have expected, because, as her betrothed had said, it had been agreed upon between them that, in the event of his being appointed consul to Delfcome, they should be married and go out with their sons and daughters together. But she did expect a few weeks' time for preparation, and was not ready for this sudden departure. In her surprise and perplexity she had forgotten all about the obnoxious notices in the morning's papers upon which she had intended to consult Mr. Gray.

Suddenly she roused herself out of her reverie, and went into her chamber to prepare, as best she might, for her sudden marriage ceremony. She put on a garnet-colored velvet carriage dress, with a turban hat to match, wrapped a rich India shawl about her shoulders, drew on a pair of cream-colored kid gloves,

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took a point-lace pocket handerchief, and was ready for the rites.

She went into the parlor to wait for Mr. Gray.

He came in a few moments.

"Really, my dear, that is right. You look charming. Could not look better if your dress had come straight from Worth. The girls are in the carriage downstairs. Will you come?"

She nodded, and then smiled as she looked at him. Mr. Gray had found time to put himself into an elegant evening suit of fine black cloth, and to stick an orchid in his buttonhole, and to select a rare bouquet, which he presented with a bow.

She took it, passed her hand round his arm, and went downstairs, where, before the ladies' entrance, the two carriages stood.

"You have no time to speak to the girls now. You will see them at the parsonage," said Mr. Gray, as he put the lady in the empty carriage and took the seat at her side.

"To the Smithsonian Institute," was the order he gave to the coachman, and the carriages started, crossed the avenue, went down Fourteenth Street, and entered the Smithsonian grounds, and soon drew up before the main entrance.

"Remain here, my dear, while I go and hunt up the boys and their tutor," said Mr. Gray, as he left the carriage.

"You will be most likely to find them either in the library or the museum," said the lady.

The gentleman nodded, and hurried into the building. He was apparently as prompt and successful in finding as in other ventures, for he soon appeared with the two boys, both radiant with delight at some anticipated "fun"—though whether it was to be a drive into the country, or a visit to a matinee or the circus, they could not tell. They pinned their faith on Uncle Joe, as they had taken to calling the Honorable Joel.

The boys were hurried into the carriage with the two girls.

The Rev. Tim Toomie came sauntering in the wake,

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looking dazed through his spectacles, as if he did not just see what was afoot.

"Take a seat in this carriage, sir. We may want your assistance," said Mr. Gray, holding the door open.

"Yes, come in, please, Mr. Toomie," added Mrs. Elde.

And the little parson, smiling on one and then on the other, in the most confiding way, though he did not know what it was all about, got in and settled himself on the front seat, opposite the middle-aged pair.

"Drive to the house of the Rev. Dr. Truman, next door to the Church of the Heavenly Hope," was the next order given to the coachman, and the carriages started.

Then the little parson began to see light. He knew that the lady and gentleman sitting before him had been "engaged" for some time, and now they were going together, with all their children, and in "marriage garments," as one might say, to the house of the same clergyman who in his church had married the young pair early in the morning of that same day. Clearly there could be no doubt as to the nature of their errand. So the little fellow smiled more benignly than ever on the pair and murmured:

"Oh!—ah!—yes—I see!"

In a very few minutes the carriage drew up before the parsonage.

Mr. Gray alighted, handed down his matronly bride-elect, and spoke quickly to the boys and girls, who had all four tumbled tumultuously out of the second carriage.

"Abbot, give your arm to Mabel. Rudolph, give yours to Minnie. Girls, behave yourselves. Mr. Toomie, see that your charges conduct themselves like gentlemen! Follow us in order into the house. Come, my dear," he added to Mrs. Elde, and led her up the steps, followed by the little party, walking two and two, and Mr. Toomie bringing up the rear.

It would seem that they were expected and even

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watched for, because the door was immediately opened by a neatly dressed waitress, who showed them at once into the front drawing room, where were standing Dr. Truman, in his vestments, surrounded by all his family—wife, sisters and grown-up daughters.

"Mr. Toomie," said the Honorable Joel, in a whisper, as they entered, "the service we ask of you is to give away the bride, since it seems that in your church and hers a woman never belongs to herself, not even after she has been twice married and twice widowed."

Rev. Tim smiled divinely and murmured words to the effect that he would give the lady in marriage with pleasure as often as she liked.

"Oh, no! only once, please," laughed the elderly bridegroom.

Dr. Truman advanced to meet the party and bowed gravely.

Mr. Gray returned the bow and introduced Mrs. Elde.

More bowing and scraping.

Then the reverend doctor waved his hand to the assembled company behind him, and said:

"My wife—sisters—daughters."

Still more bowing and scraping.

And then the little wedding party formed in a semi-circle before the minister, who stood on the rug with his back to the fire. Mabel and Minnie Gray stood on the left of Mrs. Elde, and Abbot and Rudolph Elde stood on the right of Mr. Gray. Rev. Tim Toomie stood behind the bride.

The ceremony was performed in the usual way, and Mr. Toomie acquitted himself with propriety, if not with grace and dignity, as church father to a lady old enough to be his mother.

When the benediction had been pronounced, congratulations were cordially offered and accepted. The boys and girls kissed their father and mother, and then, laughing with delight, kissed each other.

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"We are real brothers and sisters now, aint we, Mabel?" demanded Abbot, in great glee.

"And we'll always live in the same house, and never be lonesome, will we, Minnie?" added Rudolph.

"And raise lots of pigeons!" exclaimed Abbot.

"And lots of ferns!" added Rudolph.

"We just will!" answered the girls, in a breath.

The four young people were overjoyed at the state of affairs. Mr. Gray had so long made himself indispensable to the boys that they adored him. And Ruth Elde, in the pity of her heart, had so long been a tender mother to the motherless girls that they seemed to think there never could be any better heaven on earth than life passed in her society. In very truth, perhaps it was the young people who had brought the middle-aged couple together; and they were set up with the success of their match-making. As yet they knew nothing of the better things in store; the voyage to Europe, for instance—

"Some foreign countries for to see."

With polite adieus, the wedding party left the parsonage, and re-entered the carriages in the order in which they had left them.

Mr. Toomie, as before, stood dazed and smiling, uncertain where to bestow himself after everybody was seated, for to take his recent place and intrude upon the tête-a-tête of the bride and groom, immediately after the ceremony, would be, to say the least, unconventional, so he stood smiling benignly until Mr. Gray exclaimed in crisp, sharp tones:

"Come in, sir! Come in! We are waiting for you!"

"Yes, Mr. Toomie, we want you," added Mrs. Gray.

And the little parson, smiling on one and then on the other, re-entered the coach, and took his former seat in front of the pair.

The carriages started and drove back to the hotel, where they arrived about four o'clock in the afternoon.

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CHAPTER XIV

A PRACTICAL PAIR

"Come in. Come in, all of you. Come upstairs. I shall want you all to help me pack. And, oh, Mr. Toomie, I shall want to settle something with you," said Mrs. Gray, hurrying up the steps, followed by all the young people, including Mr. Toomie—who was still dazed—while Mr. Gray lingered below to pay off and discharge the carriages.

"Let us begin at once, mamma!" eagerly exclaimed Mabel, as she threw off her hat and mantle.

"Oh, my dear girl, I forgot. You and Minnie will have your own packing to do," said Ruth, remembering that they also were to go.

"Not at all. We packed hours ago. Papa told us to put up all his things as well as all ours, while he went to the state department and other places. And by the time he came back for us in a carriage we had finished. And he sent off all our luggage by express to the depot, before we started to come here. So that is off our minds, and we can help you, mamma, dear," said Minnie, tossing off her hat and coat.

"Your papa is certainly a steam engine!" laughed Mrs. Gray.

"And if there's any locomotive faster than that, he is that!" said Mabel.

They were all about to leave the room to commence the packing, when Mr. Gray entered.

"My dear," said his wife, "will you please talk to Mr. Toomie and ask him if he is willing to go abroad with us on short notice? He can share the boys' stateroom, you know."

"Yes, certainly. But where is Mrs. Harcourt? Heaven forgive me, I forgot all about that dear lady in the hurry of the morning's events! Why did you not invite her to take a seat in our carriage and go with us to the parsonage?" inquired the Honorable

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Joel, with regret almost amounting to grief on his honest face.

"Mrs. Harcourt, on returning to the house this morning, found a letter summoning her home to the bedside of a sick servant, and took the twelve-thirty train to West Virginia. I had just returned from seeing her off when I found you here, and your startling news and more startling plans put her and everything else out of my head. Now speak to Mr. Toomie and let me go and pack, for it will take every minute of my time to do so between this and nine o'clock, if we are to take the nine-thirty to Goeberlin."

"All right, my dear."

Mr. Toomie was more than surprised, he was amazed at the sudden announcement that the united families were about to go to Europe; and he was more than delighted, he was transported with the proposal that he should go with them, still in charge of the boys.

To go to the old world some day, some distant day, had been the dream of his life; but he located its realization after he should have been appointed to some parish church and labored many years and contracted preachers' sore throat and earned a long holiday, for which he should be sent to Europe at the cost of his affectionate congregation. But now! To have the fruition of his fairest hopes dropped suddenly into his lap!

It was too much for his self-possession and dignity. He betrayed his enraptured condition to the amusement of the Honorable Joel, and only stipulated for one day's leave in which to visit and bid good-by to his father and mother, sisters and brothers and maiden aunts and grandmother, who all lived together on a small farm in the neighborhood of Goblin Hall and Wheatlands, and who considered Timothy "the flower of" their rather large "flock."

By eight o'clock, and full an hour before Mrs. Gray had hoped to accomplish the task, the trunks were all packed and dispatched to the depot, and the united families sat down to dinner.

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There were no toasts drunk, no speeches made, but it was a joyous feast, for all that. And when it was over, Mrs. Gray summoned the porter and sent out a large mail—cards of adieu to all her acquaintances, especially to the Bushes, and an explanatory letter to Roma.

At a quarter past nine the whole jolly party, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Gray, the two girls, the two boys and the tutor, were seated in a Pullman car, which, as the travel was not at that season very crowded, they had all to themselves. They were a very happy company; but the happiest soul there was Tim Toomie. The boys and girls kept up an incessant chatter and laughter. The middle-aged couple talked brightly of their future plans; but the tutor was too happy to talk. He was going to Delfcome. Going to Scotland—the land of Scott, the land of Burns. He could think of nothing else just then.

The train started and sped northward. Hours passed.

The steward came in to make up the berths, and soon each of the seven passengers were tucked away for the night—Mr. Gray, Mr. Toomie and the boys on the upper berths; Mrs. Gray and the two girls on the lower ones; while the train flew on with lightning speed.

"Oh, isn't this just jolly, sleeping on shelves, all of us in the same car, Mr. Toomie?" called Abbot, poking his curly black head out under his red curtain.

But Mr. Toomie, to whom such communism was quite entirely novel, and seemed not quite entirely proper, and who had climbed to his roost without even taking off his coat or his boots, did not reply, and scarcely dared to breathe.

But the swift, smooth run of the train favored sleep, and soon the whole party were in the land of dreams, from which they did not fully awake for several hours. Vaguely mixed up with their dreams were the stoppages at the few stations on the program of this express train.

About sunrise they woke up, and each one began to

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arrange his or her toilet as best he or she could behind their curtains.

Mr. Tim Toomie was the first to wake. When he collected his senses and realized his situation, he peeped under his red curtain first, and, seeing no one out, sneaked down and stole out of the sleeping car, for fear some one should see him. Of course, as he had slept in all his clothes, his clerical suit needed much brushing. He found a whisk in the gentlemen's dressing room, and stood on the platform to brush himself off.

He was soon joined by Mr. Gray and the two boys.

"Good-morning, Mr. Toomie. How did you sleep?" inquired the Honorable Joel.

"Ah—ah—soundly, thank you, sir!' exclaimed the startled Tim.

"Glorious country we are passing through," said Mr. Gray.

The train was rounding a lofty, wooded mountain, about halfway up its height. Below, on the right, fell the undulating side of the declivity down to a deep valley, through which a narrow river ran. Above, on the left, towered heights beyond heights of ascent, lost in a soft, white fog that clung about them. All the rest of the landscape was bathed in sunshine.

The Rev. Tim was thinking of the lakes and mountains of Scotland, which he highly exaggerated in his imagination, and so slighted the fine scenery which lay all around him.

"Oh, wasn't it fun sleeping on a shelf, all of us in one car, and running along all the time?" said Abbot. "First I dreamt I was tossing in a ship on the ocean, and then I thought I was riding on a galloping horse over the hills, and the last was the funniest of all; I dreamt I was a carrier pigeon, going between two armies with dispatches, and I was blown about by the heavy winds and frightened by the cannonading; I was glad when I woke from that dream, if it was funny."

When the passengers had completed their hasty

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toilets, they had breakfast brought from the refreshment car, and a very good breakfast, too, with excellent coffee, bread and beefsteak, which they all enjoyed much.

In the forenoon they crossed that spur of the Alleghany Mountains, and descended into an undulating, well-watered and well-wooded country.

At noon, after fifteen hours' travel, they got off the train at the little station, Goeberlin, about five miles from Goblin Hall.

Here the carriages that had been called by telegraph waited them.

Mr. Gray put his wife and two daughters in one carriage, and himself, the tutor and the two boys in the other, which was nothing better than a farm wagon.

And so they set off for Goblin Hall.

Their way wound in and out among the wooded hills, until they reached the outermost farm gate, and entered a shaded road between stubble fields and leafless orchards, which finally brought them up to the house.

"Pompous Pirate," who had been notified by telegram, and who had sent the carriages, stood in the open door to welcome the "fambly," as he called the party.

"Mighty proud to see you back, mist'ess, wiv all de young marsers an' mississes," he said, but looking surprised at the additions to the family party.

"Your mistress has changed her name for mine, Pompous," Mr. Gray explained, as they entered the house.

"'Deed, sir! Well, it is jes' wot I 'spected for to be dis long time pas'. It's de sollum fac', for Lord's truf e, I did. An' I ain't gifted wid de gif' ob prophesyin', neither. Well, 'deed, I wishes ob you all de joys an' comfords an' happ'nesses in dis worl' an' de nex'. I do for a sollum fac', it's de Lord's truf e," said the negro, bowing and scraping, as he ushered the party into the large oak-paneled parlor, where a great

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wood fire was burning in the open fireplace, and a dinner table was set.

"You must put three more plates and knives and forks, Pompous," said Mrs. Gray.

"Sartny, ma'am! Sartny! W'ich it would 'a' been done 'fo' if I had known," said the man, with more bowing and scraping.

"Come, my dears, we will go upstairs, and take off our wraps and get ready for dinner," said Mrs. Gray to the girls. "Come into my room first," she said, when they had reached the second floor, "for I had no opportunity of ordering a spare room prepared for you; but it shall be done immediately."

She led them into a spacious chamber over the parlor. The whitewashed walls, the white-curtained windows and dressing tables, and the bare floor, must have given rather a chilly aspect to the place on this cold November day, but for the great wood fire that burned on the open hearth.

They crowded to the fire first of all, and while standing on the little strip of home-made carpet that passed for a rug, took off their hats and coats. In the midst of this a colored woman burst into the room with joyous tumultuousness, exclaiming:

"How do, Miss Rufe? I done jes' hear de news! So you's done got married ag'in! Well, Lord! dis is de fird time in my membry! Whip you hosses! Ain't you great on marr'in', rather? But I wishes ob you joy, honey! I does, 'fo' de Lord! An' yer good gentleman! An' de chilluns, too—bofe boys an' gals! I wishes ob you all joy! I do!"

"Thank you, Chloe. And now I want you to get the front room across the hall, opposite to this, ready for these young ladies. It is clean, I hope?" said Ruth.

"Wot yer talking 'bout, honey? Course it's clean as a penny!"

"Very well, then," said Mrs. Gray. "Have a good fire built, and——"

"Now, look yere, Miss Rufe! Who you fink's a fool? I knows how to fix a room for young ladies 'out

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you tellin' ob me. You jes' go down to dinner 'fo' it's sp'iled," said the "spoiled" waiting woman.

Ruth Gray laughed, and when she and the girls had washed their hands, smoothed their hair, and put on fresh collars and cuffs, they went down to the oak-paneled parlor, where they found Mr. Gray, the tutor and the two boys—who had all in the meantime attended to their own toilets—waiting for them.

The dinner was delicious and well appreciated by the party, who chatted and laughed, as they had been doing every day since they had joined forces, except while they slept.

At last Mrs. Gray said:

"I wonder where they are now."

"Who?" inquired Mr. Gray.

"Will and Roma, of course."

"Oh, those two. Well, my dear, as to their bodies, they are in the Guyon Manor House, on the Isle of Storms. As to their souls, they are in the seventh heaven of bliss. Long may they remain there! God bless them!"

"I don't know," sighed Ruth. "I feel very anxious about them. I do not think Will ever fully recovered his mental balance after that brain fever. There was something very queer about him. I shouldn't wonder at anything happening to him."

"Why, what do you mean, my dear?"

"Just this; that he may get worse."

"Oh, I don't think so. I have great faith in happiness as a restorative."

With these words the party arose from the table.

Mrs. Gray, the girls and the two gentlemen went into the drawing room, where also a blazing fire was burning in the broad chimney place.

The boys went out to inspect their pigeon box, which was made in the shape of a little gothic temple, and set upon a pole a few feet from the house and just in front of their room, from which they could see it any time.

The short November afternoon was drawing to a close. The sun was on the edge of the horizon.

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"Poor Psyche! I feel very sorry for her now. I wonder if she misses Cupid?" said Abbot.

"Of course she does. And I reckon she would break her heart if she knew how far off he was," replied Rudolph.

"Well, I will write to Roma, and tell her not to forget to bring Cupid home when she comes here to settle. Roma will remember to do it. Roma is tender hearted," said Abbot.

While they were speaking they were bringing a step-ladder from behind the house, which they now placed against the pole, intending to climb it to inspect the condition of Psyche.

While they were adjusting the ladder they heard a light whirr of wings, and saw a pigeon dart through the door of the dovecote. But what astonished the boys was that there was something white visible under the right wing of the bird before the wings folded as it darted through the door.

Without speaking, and in intense curiosity, Abbot quickly ascended the ladder, while Rudolph stood at its foot and held it steadily against the pole.

Abbot put his hand in through the pigeon hole, and quickly brought out a pigeon, and as quickly came down the ladder, exclaiming:

"Oh, my eye! Oh, did you ever! Oh, Rudy, what do you think?"

"What is it? Tell me!" exclaimed the younger boy, as the two now stood at the foot of the ladder.

"Oh, I never could have believed it!"

"What is it, then?" impatiently demanded Rudolph.

"It's Cupid! It's our carrier pigeon come back to Psyche! and he has got a note under his wing! I know how it happened as well as if I had seen it. Cupid pined for Psyche, and Roma pitied him and let him loose to take his chances. But first she wrote a note and fastened it under his wing. Wait till I take it off and put the darling bird back in the box with his mate. There, there, Cupid, my little man,

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you shall go to her,' said Abbot, talking very rapidly while he unpinned the paper.

And before he looked at it he climbed the ladder again and put the pigeon back in the box with his mate, and listened until he heard the contented cooing with which they greeted each other.

Then he came down to the ground and looked at the little billet, and read:

"To Mrs. Ruth Elde, Goblin Hall."

"It is for mamma."

And both boys ran impetuously to the house and burst breathlessly into the drawing room, exclaiming:

"Oh, mamma, mamma, our carrier pigeon has come back with a letter from Roma!"

The astonished party gazed in such dumfounded silence that the boys, both together, repeated the news and told the story in all its details.

"It is impossible!' said Mrs. Gray.

"They do fly vast distances," observed Mr. Gray.

"Give me the letter," said Mrs. Gray.

"Here it is, mamma; and the letter carrier is in the pigeon box, telling his mate all about it. You can see for yourself, if you wish to. And you can hear for yourself, if you understand pigeon talk," said Abbot, handing over the fine fold of tissue paper, while the tutor and the two girls gazed in wonder and curiosity.

Mrs. Gray unfolded the note and read aloud:

"'I am on the Isle of Storms, in good health, but in deadly peril. Come and rescue me as soon as possible. ROMA.'"

"There, I knew it!" she exclaimed, bitterly.

"What?" demanded several voices, in chorus.

"Why, just what I expected! She says she is in deadly peril! Of course, Will Harcourt has gone raving mad, and there is not a soul on that lonely island able to control him, and she is in danger of being murdered by a madman every moment of her life!"

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"What can we do?" inquired Mr. Gray.

"What? Why, go to her relief immediately! Yes, even if we have to leave all our business undone. A human life—a life like Roma's is worth much more than household goods or trunks of clothing."

"We may manage it, my dear, without damage to our goods and chattels, I think. Give your directions to my girls. They are intelligent lasses. Leave them here to put away, or to pack up; I will trust my affairs in the hands of young Toomie and my overseer, Drake. After the young people have done their part, Mr. Toomie can bring them on to New York to meet us for the voyage. You and I will take carpetbags and start to catch the ten o'clock express that stops at Goeberlin. Now, go get ready while I order the carriage."

"Joe, you take my breath away with your promptitude!" exclaimed Ruth.

"My dear, my rule is to act while other people are talking about acting," said the Honorable Joel, as he got up, took his hat and walked out to see about the carriage.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Abbot. "Going away again at a tangent."

Almost before they could realize the fact, Mr. and Mrs. Gray were seated in the carriage on their way to catch the express train across the country from Goeberlin to Snowden.

A fast drive of forty-five minutes brought them to the little station, just as the eastern train came up. They had but a few seconds to get their tickets and hurry into their place before the train started.

Their route was almost due east, and only ten hours' ride.

So, after another night in the sleeping car, they arrived in good order, at about eight o'clock, at the little seaside station of Snowden.

As there was no ferry running between the mainland and the island, Mr. Gray hired a boat in which the pair embarked for the Isle of Storms.

"And, oh! what shall we find when we reach there?"

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moaned Ruth. "I have been praying for Roma all the way, yet my anxiety grows more unbearable the nearer I get to her."

CHAPTER XV

IN DEADLY DANGER

After Roma had set free her carrier pigeon and watched it out of sight in its northwest course, a bee line to Goblin Hall, she turned, sank on her knees and prayed for the success of her venture. Even after she had finished her earnest prayer, she remained on her knees with her head bent on the cushion of the chair at which she knelt in weariness of body and anxiety of mind.

She was startled by a rap at her chamber door.

"Who is there?" she inquired, rising.

"Me, Miss Roma," said the voice of Wilet, from without.

Roma opened the door.

"Lor's 'a' messy, chile, wot make yo' lock yo' do' ebery time? Dey ain't no yobbers nor murderers on dis yere place!" said Wilet, coming in. "Well, honey, dinner's on de table. I on'y come to tell yo' dat."

"I shall not go down to dinner. You may bring me a plate of soup," said Roma.

"Hi, honey! Ain't yo' well?" inquired the surprised negress.

"Yes; perfectly well; but I am tired and would rather not go down. I am not dressed, you see," Roma explained, looking down on her traveling suit, that she had never changed.

"Lor', honey, wot matter 'bout dress w'en it ain't nobody but yo' own dear husbun', who would fink yo' looked lubly in anyfing! Come, honey, come down! On'y fink, yo' dear husbun' eat his breakfas' all 'lone wiv hisse'f, an' his lunchun all 'lone by hisse'f, an' now yo' want him to eat his dinner all 'lone by hisse'f!

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An' yo' two not been married two days yet! 'Tain't yight, honey! 'deed it ain't! 'fo' de Lor' it ain't! Come, now, take a 'sideration on to it, an' make a 'xertion an' come down," pleaded Wilet.

"I tell you no, I will not. Bring me up a plate of soup," replied Roma, so emphatically that Wilet did not continue her unwelcome counsel.

"De Lor's 'a' messy! Well, young mist'ess, wot mus' I tell de young marster?" she inquired.

"Nothing from me."

"But s'pose he axes?'

"Then tell him what you please; but nothing from me."

"No messidge?"

"Not a word."

"Well, Lor'!" muttered the negro woman, as she left the room and heard her mistress lock the door after her. "Yere's a lubber's quarrel wiv a wengunce! Ain't she spunky, neider? Whip yo' hosses! He'll hab to go down on his marrow bones 'fo' she'll make up wiv him! Well! dis yere bein' ob a lubber's quar'l 'tween new-mar'd husbun' an' wife, I ain't agwine to hab nuffin' 'tall to do long ob it, one way or t'udder! Not me! Not Wilet. Jes' as soon try to interfer' 'tween a he wild cat an' a she-wolf. Doan wan' my eyes scratched out, an' my teef knock' down my t'roat, an' all de ha'r pulled out'n my head. No, 'deed! Doan ketch Wilet interferrin' 'tween man an' wife, an' get bofe of um down on me."

This prudential resolution brought the woman into the small, oak-paneled dining room where the dinner table was set for two.

Hanson was in perfect evening dress, except that he had no flower in his buttonhole. There were no blooming flowers at this season on the island. He stood on the rug with his back to the fire.

'Rusalem had just brought in the soup, and was setting it carefully at the head of the table.

"Where is your mistress?" inquired Hanson of either or of both the servants.

"Into her own yoom, young marster," replied Wilet,

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with the air of saying: You know that, and you know why.

"Let her know that dinner waits."

"Did do dat, young marster, but 'twasn't no use. Couldn't 'suade her to come down on no 'count," said Wilet.

"Oh, that's the game, is it? All right! 'I bide my time,'" muttered Hanson to himself, as he took his seat at the table, while old 'Rusalem helped him to soup.

Leaving her "ole man" to wait on the "young marse," Wilet left the room to go to the kitchen and fill a plate with soup, which she carried upstairs to her young mistress.

Again, to her disgust, she found the door locked, and had to hold the little waiter, with the soup plate, unsafely in one hand while she wrapped with the other.

"Wot does make yo' lock yo'se'f up in his yere room, young mist'ess? Yo' ain't no call to be feared o' nuffin' yere?" again inquired Wilet, as soon as the door was opened to her.

But, as before, Roma made no reply, nor did the woman press the question.

She arranged the little service on a stand, and stood by while her mistress took the soup in silence.

"Wunder she doane ax me wot young marse say 'bout her not comin' down to dinner? But she's too mad an' too proud to 'tend to take any interust in him. Whip yo' hosses! Ain't she got a will of her own! Hush, honey!" thought Wilet to herself.

Roma finished her soup, for she was too strong and healthy to let any trouble of her own take away her appetite.

"Now, dere's fish, honey," said Wilet, as she lifted the empty plate.

"Bring me a piece," said Roma, shortly.

Wilet went away and brought the fish. On this occasion Roma had left her door unlocked.

After the fish came roast canvas-back duck, dressed

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with celery seed, and some side dishes; then a delicate custard; and finally a cup of coffee.

Wilet made several journeys from the kitchen to the lady's chamber, but she was really a "strang jaud," and could well stand the exercise.

Roma made a good dinner.

"Temper doan take away her appetite, anyways. Young marster better look out how he 'vokes her. 'Deed had he! Oh, he'll jes' wish de debbil had him 'stead ob her. Yes, sir!" meditated Wilet, as she watched her mistress.

She took away the little coffee service and left the room.

Roma locked the door. Half an hour passed, and there came a rap.

"Who is there?" again inquired Roma.

"Me, young mist'ess, ma'am. 'Rusalem wid some hickory logs fo' de fire. Gwine to be a cole night, young mist'ess, I do tell yo'. Got to keep de fires up."

Roma opened the door and admitted the man, who lugged a huge armful of heavy, hickory logs, which he slowly lowered to the hearth, and then piled one by one on the strong andirons, which were cast to bear great weights.

"Is it very cold here in winter?" inquired Roma, only by way of courtesy to the old servant.

"Cole? Hush honey! Cole ain't no name fur it. Now, dis yere day is on'y de sixteenph ob November, an' on de mainlan' ober dere, 'bout fibe miles f'om de sho', de leaves ain't all fallen offen de trees yet, w'ile yere, on dis islan'—hush, honey!—dere ain't a leaf lef' nowhar. W'y, in two, t'ree weeks it'll be so cole yere it'll all but take de ha'r offen yo' head an' de skin offen yo face! Cole? Cole ain't no name fo' it," he said.

And then he swept up the hearth, and went and lighted the wax candles at each end of the mantle-piece and those on the dressing table.

"Now, young mist'ess, any mo' o'ders, ma'am?" he inquired when he had finished.

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"No orders, thank you, Jerusalem," replied the lady. And the old man left the room.

He had scarcely passed out when Wilet came in.

She this time carefully locked the door behind her, and then crept to the side of her mistress, put her hand up to her own cheek, as to guard the sound of her voice from going any further than the lady's ears, and mysteriously whispered:

"Miss Roma, ma'am, I did say as I wouldn't interfer' twixt man an' wife; but, honey, I'se got somefin' werry impo'ten' to tell yo', w'ich I find it is my dooty to tell you."

"What do you mean?" anxiously demanded the lady, thinking that the news might in some way concern herself and her own safety on the island.

"Honey, chile, yo' mus' scuse me, but yo' drivin' dat young ge'man to his ruin. 'Deed you is, honey. Yo' ole Aunt Wilet ain't tellin' ob yo' no lie."

"How to his ruin? What do you mean?" again inquired Roma.

"Honey, his onhap'ness has done druv him to drinkin' mo' 'n is good fo' him dis precious eben'. He done made 'Rusalem open dat box ob wine wot he fotch yere long ob him, an' he's got it down unnerneaf ob de table, so he kin help hisse'f. Oh, honey! do, fo' de Lor's sake, go down an' make up 'long ob him, an' coax him to come upstairs long o' yo'. Do, honey! Doan let pride an' temper be de ruin ob him!" pleaded the woman.

Roma reflected. She had not the slightest intention of going near the villain who had entrapped her, or even of sending him any message, or of holding the slightest communication with him in any way whatever. But she knew that her course must seem so strange and even mad to the servants of the house, who did not know the cause of her conduct, that she felt almost tempted to confide in Wilet, and tell her the real state of the case; but she could not bring herself to do so yet. She would wait the result of her venture by the carrier pigeon.

"Don't disturb yourself, my good woman; leave—

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him—the man—to himself. I certainly shall not go downstairs to-night. That will do. You may go," she said, not unkindly.

And Wilet left the room, muttering to herself:

"Well, I'se done my dooty, an', Lor' knows, I didn' want to do it, nuther! An' I can't do no mo'! But dere he is a-swillin', an' a-swillin', jes' like any pig! I—I hopes he ain't quarrelsome in his drink! Dunno, dough! 'Deed, I gwine take myse'f off to bed, out'n harm's way! An' my ole man, too. Ain't gwine to stay up yere, an' let 'Rusalem stay, to hab our two heads broke by a drunken man, wid no one to 'trol him."

Her meditations brought her to the kitchen, where she found 'Rusalem sitting in the chimney-corner, smoking his pipe.

"Well, ole man, yer done cl'ar off de dinner table?"

"Yaas, Wilet, all but de wine."

"Umph! Well, I doan wan' yo' to go back dere 'g'in to-night, no ways."

"I ain't no call! Soon's ebber I done draw de corks ob two bottles, young marse say to me, he say:

"'Eberny," he say, 'you can take yo'se'f off, now, an' needn' come back. I shan' wan' yo'.' And so I make my 'bedience, and comes down yere to smoke my pipe."

"Thanks be to goodness!" exclaimed Wilet, fervently. "And no' soon's ebber you get t'rough dat, come up into de lof' and come to bed out'n harm's way."

And with these words, Wilet climbed a corner staircase that led from the kitchen to their sleeping room above.

Meanwhile Roma, alone in her chamber, on this second night after the fraudulent marriage ceremony, became full of fears that she could not subdue.

The news brought her by the colored woman was much more alarming than she had permitted to appear before her informant.

And for this reason:

Hanson was drinking freely. He was not an

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habitual drinker of vinous or spirituous liquors, and he could be strongly affected by a very little of either. She had seen this weakness of Hanson's often during her holiday visits to his sister, her dearest school friend.

She had said, from her knowledge of another weakness in his character, namely, his shrinking dread of violence of any sort, and even of heated argument of any sort—a dread of scenes that fell into real cowardice—that she would be safe from any rudeness from him—provided that he should drink no wine.

But, if he should drink, she knew that wine would transform him, craze him, and that she would have nothing to hope from his forbearance—everything to fear from his madness!

She had locked her door and hooked in her window shutters. But might not a madman burst open the door? Or, might not a man, by means of the trees and running vines, climb to her window and easily break it open?

What should she do? If she could only defend herself for one or two days longer—then, indeed, help and deliverance might come to her—provided her carrier pigeon had safely reached its destination.

But how should she defend herself for these one or two days?

Oh! if she had a sure weapon.

Suddenly a thrill of joy shot through her form.

She had a weapon! A sure weapon! She had forgotten it, it had been so long since she had occasion to carry it. But now she remembered all about it.

The case was this:

One Christmas vacation she was spending at home, when her father and her uncle both came back on a very short leave. When they were about to go away again her father had placed in her hand a Colt's revolver of the largest caliber, and had said to her:

"My brave girl, we leave you here almost unprotected. Take this pistol; keep it always at hand.

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Take it with you when you go abroad. Put it under your pillow when you go to sleep. Have it always at hand. It may be needed to save your life and your honor, which is dearer than life."

Then he had taught her how to load it and how to fire it, and had exercised her in these arts until she was perfect in them.

He had left the pistol with her.

She had obeyed his instructions to the letter, and when she had left school for the last time and come home "for good," to learn soon afterward that her uncle and her father had both fallen in battle, and that the war was over, and found that the country was overrun with the refuse of the disbanded armies, and it was no longer safe for a lady to walk alone in solitary places, then the pistol was for a long while her constant companion in her rides and drives around Goblin Hall. She never had had occasion to use it in self-defense; but to keep it in good order she occasionally fired it off, cleaned and reloaded it, and taught her boy cousins to use it.

Of late all this care had been purely mechanical.

On the day before her wedding, Abbot had asked leave to fire off and clean and reload her pistol "for the last time." He had pleaded pathetically, and his petition had been granted.

And now that pistol was in its case in the top of her traveling trunk, which still stood unpacked in the corner of her room.

She drew her bunch of keys from her pocket, where they had lain for forty hours, and went and unlocked her trunk.

The pistol case lay on the very top of the top tray. It had been one of the very last things put in before the trunk was locked and strapped and sent off by express.

She took it out, opened it, and extracted the pistol, and laid it on the little stand beside the easy-chair.

Then she locked her trunk and pushed it back into its corner.

She looked at her watch and found that it was

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within a few minutes of eleven o'clock. She was very weary, yet afraid to retire to bed, even with the pistol at hand.

So she sank into the easy-chair and tried to rest. Notwithstanding danger, anxiety and the need of vigilance as the price of safety, overtasked and weary nature asserted her rights, and Roma dozed—started out of her sleep with the guilty fear of a sentinel waking from slumber on his post; but dozed again, started slightly and fell deeper into slumber, until at last all consciousness was lost in the profound sleep of the double weariness of soul and body.

She may have slept one or two hours; she never knew how long; when she was roused out of slumber by a shuffling, tumbling, noisy approach to her door, soon followed by a loud knocking.

She started at once to her feet. She was not dazed or confused, as people often are when suddenly shocked out of deep sleep. All her faculties rallied immediately to her relief.

She knew exactly what had happened, and what was about to happen.

The intoxicated madman was pounding at her door, and before long would burst into her room. She took her pistol in her right hand and asked herself one question.

If it should become necessary for self-defense, should she kill him? And the answer came distinctly from her heart:

No—she would "do no murder"; nor would it be necessary. She was a sure shot; she would disable him.

Meantime the pounding at the door continued. She would not speak to ask who was there. She would never speak to him again or notice him again if she could possibly avoid doing so.

The pounding continued, and increased in violence and rapidity.

Still she gave no sign of hearing it, but stood up, with her pistol cocked, on guard.

"Why don't you open the door, you jade?" came

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in a voice of thunder from this elegant villain, transformed by drink into a coarse ruffian.

Still she would not answer, but stood on guard, pistol in hand, eyes on fire, teeth set, face white as snow, soul resolved.

"Open the door, vixen! If you don't, by——, I will stave it open, and then look out for yourself!" roared the brute.

She never moved or spoke, but stood on guard.

One, two, three, four tremendous blows of some heavy missile driven against it, and the door flew open with its broken lock, and within the framework stood the ruffian, red-eyed, inflamed, glaring, panting, maddened, yet somewhat weakened by his furious exercise, and probably, also, by reaction from the violent toward the stupid stage of intoxication.

She stood some four feet from him. She covered him with the muzzle of her pistol, fixed him with the steady gaze of her strong eyes, and said, in calm, low, stern tones:

"Put but one foot across the doorsill of my room, and I will shoot you down."

He recoiled, more from the woman than from her weapon; but only for an instant. Then he recovered himself, his face flamed with a deeper crimson, his bloodshot eyes blazed on her.

"Put down that pistol, you virago. Put it down, or I'll——"

She never moved her firm finger from the trigger or fixed eyes from his infuriate face.

"Put it down, I say, or, by all the devils, it will be the worse for you, you tigress!" he roared.

She never stirred.

With a terrible oath, he rushed upon her, but stumbled, fell heavily and lay floundering on the floor, thus escaping the shot she had fired at the instant of his start.

She stepped back and looked down at him as he lay floundering, and rolling, and struggling to rise.

But the reaction had set in too strongly. At every effort to rise he fell again.

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"Help me up, you she-devil!" he roared.

She did not reply, but left the room and went downstairs, and down the dimly-lighted hall to the rear of the house, turned into a side passage, opened a back door, and entered the kitchen, which was luridly illumined by a mass of smoldering oak logs. She did this with the freedom from excitement that was in perfect consistency with her calm, strong organization.

She did not know where the servants' sleeping room was located, but she supposed it must be somewhere off the kitchen. She saw the little corner staircase, and began to ascend the stairs. At the top she found a door, fastened from within.

She was right in conjecturing it to open into the servants' room; for, at her first knock, a voice answered, by a sharp demand, in a terrified voice:

"Who dar?"

"It is I, your mistress. Get up and dress yourselves, both of you, and come to my assistance," she answered.

"Oh! my Lord in heaven, wot has happen ob now?" exclaimed the quavering voice of Wilet.

"Come out and see as soon as you possibly can," replied Roma.

She heard a shuffling movement within the room, and very soon the man and woman came out in their hastily assumed clothes.

CHAPTER XVI

TO THE RESCUE

"Wot on yeth is de matter, young mist'ess?" anxiously inquired Wilet, 'Rusalem looked on with eyes and mouth wide open.

"Follow me, both of you," said Roma.

"Lemme light a candle fust," said Wilet, retreating into her loft.

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Roma went down the stairs, followed by her factotum, who was too dazed to venture a word of inquiry.

They stood in the luridly lighted kitchen until Wilet came out of her room, bringing a flaring tallow candle in a brass candlestick, and slowly descended the stairs.

"Now, young mist'ess, I'se been finking it all ober, an' I kin fairly guess wot's de matter. Yes, ma'am, yer wants me an' my ole man to tote young marster up to bed. I t'ought how it would be. I t'ought how he'd tumble offen his chair, unnerneaf de dining-yoom table fo' he stopp' drinking. I t'ought so. 'Deed did I. Now, ain't dat de case, young mist'ess?" inquired Wilet, as she reached the kitchen floor.

"Something like it. Come with me," replied the lady, leading the way into the narrow side passage, and through it to the dimly lighted hall.

The dining-room door was partly open, showing the brightly lighted interior, the table with its red dessert cloth, its empty and half-full bowls, its stained wine glasses, stumps of cigars and other litter of a disorderly course.

"Not in there!" ssaid Roma, as the two negroes stopped at the door as if they would have entered the room.

"Not in yere! W'ere, den, honey?" inquired Wilet.

"Upstairs! Come!" Roma replied, and led the way to the upper regions.

Arrived at the landing, they found the upper hall, lighted from the open door of Roma's room, where four wax candles were ablaze. Arrived at the door, the two negroes drew back in disgust.

There, just across the threshold, lay the body of Hanson, sprawling face downward on the floor, in the half stupor and entire helplessness of intoxication.

Wilet had declared that she had expected this, or something of the sort, yet now she uttered a groan of dismay.

'Rusalem folded his hands and rolled up his eyes in holy horror.

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Neither of the negroes had noticed the broken lock of the door; they were both engrossed with the sight of the man on the floor.

"Umme! Umme! Oh, Lor'!—umme!" groaned Wilet. "Wot mus' we do 'long o' him, young mist'ess? Mus' we lay him on de bed jes' as he is, or mus' we undress him fust?"

"Neither. Take him into some other room," Roma answered, promptly.

The two negroes looked at their stern, young mistress, then looked at each other, and hesitated. Here was a savage young lady indeed. Going to banish her husband of two days only just because he sat a little too long over his wine, and took a drop too much; and all her fault, too, for quarreling with him, and refusing to make up.

"Does yer yeally mean it, honey?" Wilet ventured to inquire.

"Most certainly I do. I called you up here for the purpose. Take him away at once," sharply rejoined Roma.

"W'ere shall we take him, mist'ess?" Wilet inquired.

"Into some other room, I told you."

"W'ich yoom, mist'ess?"

"Any one."

"Dere's a yoom yight opposite ob dis, jes' crass de hall; but dere ain't no sheet on de bed, an' no fire on de hearth."

"No matter; take him there. Lay him on the outside of the bed, just as he is—in all his clothes; then you can get blankets to cover him, and light a fire on the hearth, if you choose. Do as I bid you at once."

The two colored people stooped over the fallen man, and took hold of his hands and tried to help him to rise, speaking to him at the same time.

"Come, young marster; see ef yer can't get up, sah," said 'Rusalem, coaxingly. "Time to go to bed, young marster. De flo' ain't no place fo' no gemman to sleep. Come, sah."

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But the drunken man only grunted and cursed in an aimless, incoherent way.

"You waste your words on a beast. Take him up and carry him out," said Roma.

But again the negroes tried to make some impression on the stupefied senses of the man.

"Come, young marster; make an effort, sah," pleaded 'Rusalem.

"Get up, like a good ge'man, please, sah," prayed Wilet.

But they elicited nothing except grunts and curses from the poor brute.

"Will you take him away or not?" severely demanded Roma.

The two negroes tried to lift him, but their united strength was unable to do so. The elegant dude, though not much over the average height of men, was compactly built and heavy for his size.

"We can't do it, young mist'ess—we can't do it to sabe our libes!" exclaimed 'Rusalem, dropping the head and shoulders he had been trying to raise.

"Can't do what?" Roma demanded.

"Can't lif' him up, honey," Wilet explained, dropping the feet she had held.

"Then take him by the shoulders and drag him along the floor across the hall, and so into the next room," said Roma, in a tone so peremptory that there was no misunderstanding her purpose to be promptly obeyed.

"Oh, young mist'ess!" said Wilet, deprecatingly; but seeing the expression in the lady's eyes, she turned hastily to her husband and said: "Come, 'Rusalem! Take holt! We's got to do it, sure's you lib!" And then she muttered under her breath: "Oh, ain't she ingenus, neider! Oh, won't she train a husbun' up in de way he should go? Bet yo' he won't do dis yere no mo'—leas'ways, not many times mo'!"

She laid hold of one shoulder of the helpless man, while 'Rusalem took hold of the other, and so they turned him around head toward the door, and drew him, grunting, muttering and cursing incoherently

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along the floor across the hall and into the opposite room, where it was as dark as pitch and as cold as ice.

Wilet left him there on the floor in charge of 'Rusalem, while she re-crossed the hall, re-entered her mistress' chamber, and very humbly asked:

"Would you be so good, ma'am, as to len' us de loan ob a candle, so as we can see wot we's about out yonner?"

"Take one," said Roma.

And the woman took her own tallow "dip" in one hand and a wax "mold" in the other, and went back to the dark room.

Seen by the light of the two candles, it was a large, square room, corresponding exactly to that of Roma's, except that it was dismantled—windows, bedstead, dressing table and easy-chairs were all destitute of the white draperies that should have made them attractive and comfortable.

The two negroes tried their best to lift the inebriate to lay him on the bed; but their efforts were utterly unavailing.

"If de young madam would help us, we might do it," suggested 'Rusalem.

"She!" scornfully exclaimed Wilet. "She wouldn't tetch him wid a pair o' tongs! She'd let him die yere on de flo' fo' she'd fetch him! I see it in her eyes, I do! Won't she train him? Whip yo' hosses!"

"Tell you wot, den, ole 'oman, we two can't do it. An' if de young madam won't help, dere's no one else to help, and so it can't be done. Now, tell you wot we kin do. We kin take de top mattress an' de pillows offen de bed an' spread 'em on de flo', an' draw him on to 'em," suggested 'Rusalem.

"So we kin, ole man. 'Deed you's right down good at 'vice!" exclaimed Wilet.

And together the two took the mattress off the bedstead and laid it on the bare floor, put a pillow at one end, and drew the drunken man, grunting, muttering and cursing incoherently, and laid him on it.

"Now, 'Rusalem, you go and get some pine cones

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an' kindlin' wood out'n de shed, an' make a fire yere. We must'n let dis yere po' soul get his deaf o' cole, eben if de young mist'ess has turn him out'n her yoom. Ain't she ingen's? Lor', chile, I hope she nebber come down on top o' you an me. If she does, good-by to po' us!"

'Rusalem went out obediently to do his wife's bidding.

Wilet sat down on the edge of the mattress and began to try to soothe and comfort the "suffering sinner" lying upon it.

She laid her cold hand on his scorching forehead, and whispered:

"Do yo' head ache, young marster? Would yo' wish yo' ole Aunt Wilet to put a cole, wet napkin on it? Say, young marse?"

Muttered, guttural, incoherent, profanity and obscenity were his only answer.

"Oh, come, young marse! Yo' mus'n' go on like dat! It's a sin. 'Sides w'ich, I ain't none ob dem bad names yo' call me. I's yo' po', ole Aunt Wilet, as is doin' ob de werry besses I kin fo' yo'," said the woman.

But the drunken man only turned himself over, with a heave and a plunge, and fell into a deeper stupor than before, and from which he was not aroused for many hours after.

'Rusalem came in with his bundle of cones and kindling wood, and soon had a fine fire blazing in the open chimney.

"Now, go bring up some oak logs an' lay on top o' dem," Wilet ordered.

And again her obedient companion went and did as he was told.

When an enduring fire had been built, Wilet gave more orders.

"Go up to de clothes room in de garret an' fetch down two pa' o' blankets to kivver ober dis po' sinner, for fear he'll catch cole," she said.

When this was done, and the inebriate made as comfortable as circumstances would admit, Wilet turned to the meek, old man and said:

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"Now, 'Rusalem, you sit yight yere an' watch ober dis po' sinner, w'ile I go an' see arter de young mist'ess. An' t'ank de Lord as de day is breakin'. Wot a night dis yere hab been! But dere won't be many mo' like it. No, sah! De young mist'ess won't 'mit ob no sich doin's. Ain't she ingenus? Hush, honey!"

So saying, she left the room.

She found her mistress sitting back in her chair, resting with closed eyes.

"Can I do anyfing for you, honey?" she inquired.

"No," replied the lady.

"Will you please tell all how about it, chile?"

"About what?"

"De young marse bein' lyin' sprawlin' on de flo'."

"You saw how it was yourself."

"Yes, honey, I see de young marse was—to say—a little bit obercome wid wine, as many a ge'man has been afo' him an' many will be arter him; but wot I want to know, was he wiolent, an' did he scare yo'?"

"He did not scare me."

"Well, dat was 'siderate ob him, anyways. Some ge'men w'en dey's a little de wuss fo' liquor makes deirselves wery unpleasant, wery unpleasant, indeed. An' you doan feel no wuss for w'at's happen?"

"No."

"Dat's good, too. Now, I yeckon I'd better open dese yere windies, 'case de sun is yising, an' put out dese yere cannels. Dey look sort o' ghosely by daylight," said Wilet, and she went about her business.

When she had put out the wax lights and let in the sunlight, she mended the fire, and turned to leave the room, saying:

"Now, I go down an' get breakfas' yeady. Ole man 'Rusalem he'll watch de young marster."

"I do not think that watching is necessary. Let Jerusalem come out and lock the door after him, and go with you to attend to his morning's work," said Roma.

"But, my deah, young, mist'ess."

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"Do as I tell you; and be sure to lock the door," said Roma, in a tone that could not be resisted.

"Wery well, ma'am. I yeckon you's yight. My ole man ain't de stronges' in dis worl'. An' if de young marse was to come a change ober hisse'f an' yise opstropolaus, po', ole 'Rusalem couldn't 'trol him, an' might get hurted or eben killed, my po', ole man might. So I do yeckon it's best fo' him to come out an' lock de do' on young marse, fear of accidenz," said Wilet, as she left the room.

Roma heard her call the man out from his watch and lock the door on the comatose drunkard.

"Now, at least, I am safe for some hours," she said, "and for the first time in my life I do believe I am tired. But I will not succumb to the cowardice of fatigue. A little fresh air will revive me, and I will wait and hope.'

She arose and went to the front window and threw it open.

It was a glorious sky over sea and land on this seventeenth of November.

From the hill on which the house stood the rugged descent to the beach gleamed in the slanting sunrise rays like a mountain side of gold stone. The sea was calm and purple under the clear, blue heavens. The air was fresh, soft and delightful. A warm wave was certainly passing over the latitudes.

But what was that speck upon the water?

A boat—a boat coming from the direction of Snowden. It might contain her friends coming to her rescue!

She hastened to her unpacked trunk, and took from its upper tray her opera glass, returned to the window, adjusted the lenses to her sight, and took a look at the boat. It contained four oarsmen and two passengers—the latter a man and a woman. She could not more particularly identify them from this distance. But every second brought them nearer. Soon she discerned the red stella shawl of the woman and gray ulster of the man. Soon after she was sure of their personality. They were her aunt and Mr. Gray!

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She dropped the glass and hurried downstairs, through the hall—where 'Rusalem had, not long before, extinguished the lights—past the disordered dining room, which the old man was now engaged in restoring to order, along the side passage, and so into the kitchen, where Wilet had her tea kettle hanging over a roaring fire, and her "spider" and "spider lid" beating upon it, while the cook herself had her hand in the dough tray on the table, making out rolls for breakfast.

"Wilet," said Roma, "I wish you to hurry up the very best breakfast you can get on short notice. I have company coming."

"Comp'ny, young mist'ess!" exclaimed the woman, opening her eyes to their widest extent, as well she might.

"Yes; my aunt and a friend are on their way to the island. I saw their boat from my window. I suppose they came by the night train to Snowden, and hired a boat to cross to the island."

"Did yo' 'spect dem, honey?"

"I rather hoped than expected that they would come."

"An' de young marster in de state he is, too! Oh, Lor'! Oh, Lor'! But, honey, we kin 'scuse him an' tell dem as he has a berry bad headache, indeed, an' can't see nobody. An' I yeckon dat's de trufe, too, or, if it ain't now, it will be to-morrow, sure. Oh, yes! dat's de way nature spanks dese yere young riporatees," said Wilet, as she hurried with her work, so that she soon put her rolls to bake.

"What have you in the house?" inquired her mistress.

"Dere's ham, an' blue-neck duck, an' smoke sa'mon."

"Cook them all,' said Roma, as she left the kitchen.

Passing by the dining room, where 'Rusalem was still busy, she said:

"Set the table for three, this morning, if you please."

"Yes, ma'm," answered 'Rusalem, and then to himself he said: "Fo' f'ree!'—de young marse can't come

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down, dat's sartain. An' dere's nobody but herse'f, 'cept 'tis me an' my ole 'oman. Dere now, we make jes' f'ree, so it mus' be we as she's going to 'wite to sit down to de table long ob her. Well, she is a 'centric, young 'oman, an' dat's de Lord's trufe."

Meanwhile Roma had hastened to the front door, which she unlocked and unbarred and threw open.

The boat was out of sight now. It was too near the island, under the shadow of the hill, to be seen.

Roma, without bonnet or shawl to protect her from the autumn morning air, dashed out of the house and down the cliff to meet and welcome her friends. But her glorious health and strength prevented the possibility of her taking cold from such exposure.

She reached the sands just as the oarsmen were pushing the boat ashore.

Her aunt, without waiting for a helping hand, sprang to the ground, ran to Roma, threw her arms around the girl's neck, burst into tears, and between her sobs exclaimed:

"Oh, thank Heaven, you are safe! Oh, what agonies I have suffered since yesterday afternoon! Oh, we only got your message at sunset, and we left by the first train. Oh, thank Heaven, we are in time to save you! But where is the madman?" she demanded, having hurried word upon word in an impetuous torrent.

"What madman?" inquired Roma.

"Why, Will Harcourt, of course!" exclaimed the lady, in surprise that there should be a doubt of it.

But before Roma could speak again, Mr. Gray came bustling up to them, holding out his hand and greeting the younger lady with:

"Good-morning, Mrs. Harcourt! How do you do? Very sorry to hear that you have been in trouble, and even in danger; but very glad to find you safe and well."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Gray, and thank you very much more for coming to my rescue," replied Roma, gratefully, as she took his hand.

"And how is Mr. Harcourt?" he inquired.

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"I——" Roma began, but suddenly paused, and then said: "Excuse me; is your boat hired?"

"Yes," he replied.

"For how long?"

"For the day."

"That is well; but we shall not want it for the whole day. Now, come with me to the house, and when we get there I will give you all the explanation I can; that will not be very much, nor very satisfactory," said Roma.

"Well, but tell me! How is Will?" persisted Mrs. Gray.

"I beg, dear auntie, to defer all explanation until we reach the house. We cannot talk on so disturbing a subject while we are climbing this hill," pleaded Roma.

"Oh, very well, then! So long as you are safe and sound, and we are here in time to take care of you, I can restrain my impatience to hear more! And now I have news for you on our part. We were quietly married on the day before yesterday. Mr. Gray has received his appointment as consul at Delfcome, and we are to sail for Liverpool on next Wednesday."

"I wish you both joy with all my heart!" exclaimed Roma, turning a surprised and delighted countenance upon the newly married pair, and offering each a hand.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Gray, "we were married in the afternoon, packed up in great haste and took the night express to Goeberlin. We reached the Hall a little after noon yesterday, and had but just dined and settled ourselves to rest from the journey, before beginning the business of packing up, when the two boys burst in upon us full of wonder and admiration, to show us the tiny note just brought in by the carrier pigeon. Oh, the wonder of those pigeons. Who would have ever believed who had not seen the miracle! Yes, my dear, the bird had flown straight to his home, straight into the dovecote, where his grieving mate was sitting alone. The boys were on the spot and saw it, took the pigeon, unfastened the

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note, and brought it in to me. Now, what do you think of that?"

"It is wonderful, and past finding out the power that guides them. I sent the carrier dove on a forlorn hope, indeed! Thank Heaven, it is a fulfilled hope now. And oh, I thank you and Mr. Gray for coming to me so quickly!" fervently exclaimed Roma.

"It was all Joe's promptitude. I tell you, he has acted through everything so quickly, so promptly and directly to the purpose that my breath has been gone and my hair on end ever since the day before yesterday morning, when he came into my room and said—in substance:

" 'I have been appointed consul to Delfcombe. This is November 15th. I must be at my post on December 1st. We must be married to-day, run down to Goblin Hall and Wheatlands to-night, settle our affairs at home, pack up, and start for New York, and sail for Liverpool on Wednesday.'

"There, my dear, that is what Joe said to me—in effect—and we did marry, pack up, and hurry down to Goblin Hall, as I said; and when your note was read and understood—then more hair-raising, breath-catching haste. Says Joe:

" 'We must go to her at once!'

"And the carriage was ordered, handbag packed, hats and coats put on, and we started off at night to catch the eastern train, that stops at Goeberlin at 10 P. M. We reached Snowden at eight this morning, and here we are!"

"No words can express the extent of my obligations and gratitude to you and Mr. Gray, Aunt Ruth. That you should have come to me on the eve of your voyage to Europe, when you have so much to do," said Roma.

"But, my dear, your safety was the first consideration! And, besides, we left our business at home to be completed by Mr. Toomie and our girls and boys," said Mrs. Gray.

"Are the young people to go with you?"

"Oh, of course—girls, and boys, and pigeons, and

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puppies and all, even Mr. Toomie, who is the happiest little dog at the prospect that I ever saw in all my life," said Mr. Gray, as they reached the top of the hill and came in front of the old manor house.

"Why, what a fine, old place it is!—much finer than Goblin Hall!" exclaimed Mrs. Gray, as they went up the steps to the front door, which Roma had left open.

"Yes, it is even finer than Goblin Hall. It is as fine as Mount Vernon, in some respects. Yet, I think Goblin Hall is the most interesting of the two houses. By the way, Mrs. Harcourt was to have accompanied you to the old hall. Did you leave her there?" inquired Roma.

"Dear me, no. Before we left Washington, she got a letter telling her that her old man servant was ill, dying, perhaps, and wanted to see her, to tell her something that was on his mind. So she started for Logwood at once. I took her to the train. That was before Joe came to tell me he had got his appointment and we must be married immediately. But so many things happened in that one day to take my senses away that it will be some time before I remember to tell everything," said Ruth, as they entered the hall.

"Now, aunt, perhaps you and Mr. Gray would like to go to your room before breakfast, which will soon be ready," Roma suggested.

"Not at all. We had a good night's rest in the sleeping car, made our morning toilet in the dressing room, and even took, each of us, our cup of coffee at the restaurant; so we are neither tired, dusty nor hungry just at present. We will lay off our wraps in the hall here, and then go into your parlor and hear the story that I am dying to understand," said the lady, briskly.

And suiting the action to the words, she threw off her shawl and bonnet, while Joe drew off his ulster.

And when the hall tree was laden with their outer garments, the pair followed their hostess into the

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oak-paneled parlor, where a fine, wood fire was burning in the open chimney.

CHAPTER XVII

THE NAMELESS WRONG

"Now, then!" explaimed Ruth Gray, anxiously, as she settled herself in the armchair before the glowing fire. "Tell me, for I am dying to know—how is Will Harcourt, and where is he?"

"I do not know," steadily replied Roma.

"You do not know!" exclaimed the elder, in amazement.

"I do not," repeated the younger one.

"For Heaven's sake! has he run off, in his frenzy? But he could not run off this island. Has he—has he —made away with—— Oh, Roma, my dear, what is it?" demanded Ruth, with all her first alarms returning—not for the girl, whom she saw safe before her, but for the supposed lunatic.

"Auntie, I know nothing about Will Harcourt," replied Roma, trying to steady her voice, while the pang of her heart was almost unbearable. "I have not seen him since the evening of our wedding day. Auntie, he has never crossed the threshold of this house. He may be lost, may be dead, may have been murdered. The Lord knows. I do not."

"Good Heaven, Roma!" cried the horrified matron. "You stand there like a woman of marble, without feeling, saying things that make one's blood curdle."

"I am a woman of stone, auntie. I need to be one," Roma answered.

"What do you mean?"

"Come, my dear," said Mr. Gray, gently taking the girl's hand, "you are putting too severe a constraint upon yourself. It is unnatural. Sit down, and let me get you something before you attempt to tell your story."

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And he led her to the armchair in the chimney corner, and gently placed her in it.

Before another word could be added, the old negro man put his head into the door and said:

"B'e'kfas' is on de table, mist'ess."

"Come," said Roma, rising. "We will have breakfast before entering into any explanations."

"That is best," added Mr. Gray.

"I know I shall not be able to eat a morsel while my mind is in this state of suspense," said Ruth Gray, as she went with her husband to the breakfast table, where, notwithstanding her declaration to the contrary, she did rather more than full justice to the fine coffee, rich rice waffles, buckwheat cakes, blue-neck ducks, fried ham and fresh eggs. Mr. Gray ably supported her, on his part, in these gastronomic feats. Roma also made a good breakfast, for her physical organization was too healthy and vigorous to succumb, in any manner, to any amount of mental anguish. She was not singular in this. I have known some bereaved and sorrowful women who would weep, but could eat, and eat no less that they would weep the more; and so their hearts never broke. The strong physical constitution supported the suffering and fainting soul. Roma did not even weep.

When breakfast was over, the party of three adjourned to the drawing room and drew around the wood fire.

"Now, auntie and Mr. Gray, I will tell you my story—so wild, so sad, so incomprehensible and maddening a story as you never heard before; as was never, in this world's history, I firmly believe, said before," said Roma, gathering all her strength for the ordeal.

"My dear, you alarm me. What dreadful thing have you to tell?" demanded Mrs. Gray, whose emotion was in strange contrast to Roma's cold composure.

"What would you think, auntie, if I were to tell you that, since Will Harcourt disappeared from the threshold of my door, on the evening of our wedding day, William Hanson has been staying here, and that

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he is here now?" demanded Roma, looking full in her relative's face.

"William Hanson here? Well, I am very glad to hear that! I knew, of course, that he had decided, at the last moment, to accompany you as far as Snowden, on his way to Old Point Comfort, or some other place, I forget what! Well, I suppose he detected symptoms of violent mania in poor Will—as, indeed, I myself dreaded for him—oh, how I warned you to wait, Roma! And I think it was very kind of him to stop and get off here and remain for your protection from a madman—very kind, indeed! But I don't see why he could not have kept a better watch over poor Will, and not have allowed him to escape! Oh, Roma, I am grieved to my heart for you, and for poor Will Harcourt! but I am grateful to Mr. Hanson!" Mrs. Gray fervently answered.

"Oh, you are—are you? But what if I should tell you, auntie, that this William Hanson is a villain of the basest order, a criminal of the deepest dye, a traitor, a forger, a murderer?"

"My dear child!" exclaimed the matron, aghast.

Mr. Gray put his hands in his pockets and leaned back in his chair. He was a politician fifty years old. Nothing surprised him.

"What if I were to tell you that from the hour of Will Harcourt's mysterious disappearance, this man has claimed to be my husband, to be the man who really married me! that he has produced a forged marriage license, a forged marriage certificate, and a forged letter of renunciation, purporting to come from Will Harcourt, and corroborating his story and supporting his claims?"

"My Lord, Roma, you stagger me!" cried the stupefied matron.

"What if I should tell you that this infamous criminal insists upon his marital rights? That he is my jailer, and would be my master if he could; that he burst open the door of my chamber in the dead of night, when I had to defend myself with a loaded pistol; that it became a question with me whether,

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to save my honor, I should have to kill him or myself? That it is from him that I was in 'deadly peril,' as I should have been in deadly fear could I feel fear; but I did not; I only felt murderous! That it was from him I appealed to you for rescue! You see that but for my courage and my pistol, I should have been quite helpless in the hands of that villain, on this lone island. If the carrier dove had failed, if you had not come to my help, the matter might have ended in the death of that traitor at my hands."

"The act would have been perfectly justifiable," said Mr. Gray, speaking for the first time.

"It would have been inevitable! Nevertheless, it would have darkened my life as nothing else, I think, ever could. I thank Heaven that you came in time to save me from such a desperate deed," said Roma, earnestly.

"Where is the scamp now?" demanded Mr. Gray.

"'Scamp?' Joe! what do you mean?" indignantly demanded Ruth Gray. "We call a schoolboy a scamp for playing a harmless, practical joke! This creature is a rascal! a criminal! a devil! But, my dear Roma, why did you not appeal to your two negroes to help you?"

"I was a stranger to them. They could not have understood so strange a situation! They would not have believed such an improbable story as mine must have seemed to them. They would have thought me insane, and might have taken sides with my enemy. That would have been fatal to me."

"I see," replied Ruth.

"And now," said Mr. Gray, "if you will permit me once more to put my little, unanswered question—where is the scoundrel?"

"That is better," said Ruth.

"He is sleeping off his intoxication. He was mad with drink when he broke into my room last night. I covered him with the muzzle of my pistol. He made a dash to seize the weapon. I fired and he fell——"

"My Lord, Roma!"

"Don't be alarmed, auntie! He did not fall by my

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bullet, thank Heaven! He stumbled, in his drunkenness, and fell. I called up the servants, and had him carried into an empty room and locked up. He lies there now, still in the deep stupor of intoxication, as the old negro man reports to me."

"And now, what do you wish us to do first, my dear? Shall I go over to Snowden and see a magistrate? We can have him arrested for assault, pending more serious charges," said Mr. Gray.

"No; do nothing of the sort. I wish, first of all, to get away from here—to get away from here at once, before that demon wakes from his stupor of drunkenness," said Roma.

"Why, you are not afraid of him, now that we are here?" questioned Mrs. Gray.

"No; I never was afraid of him; but I do not wish to see him or to hear his voice ever again. I wish to kill him; but I will not if I can help it, because it would break the law of God. I wish to get away from this homicidal temptation. To leave the island at once. To go to Goblin Hall as fast as an express train can carry me, there to collect myself—indeed, to find myself again."

"Very well, my dear; it shall be as you will," said Mr. Gray.

"Your boat still waits, I know."

"Of course it does."

"Well. And my trunk is packed. It has never been unpacked since my arrival here. So, my dear aunt and Mr. Gray——"

"Uncle, dear! Uncle!" amended the latter.

"Uncle, then," assented Roma. "Dear uncle and aunt, do not think me inhospitable if I urge our immediate departure."

"My dear, nothing would suit our book better. We must sail on next Wednesday. We snatched the time to come at your call to your rescue. The sooner we effect our purpose and return, the better," said Mr. Gray.

"Thank you, Uncle Joe. Then I will run upstairs and put on my things and pack my handbag."

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"And, my dear, if you can get hold of these forged papers, bring them on," said Mr. Gray.

"I will look for them. But I doubt if I can find them. Uncle Joe, will you kindly send down and get two men from the boat to come up and carry my trunk on board? I do not think that my old negro man is strong enough to lift it."

"I will go and call them," answered Mr. Gray, promptly.

Roma hastened upstairs to her chamber. It required but a few minutes for her to pack her handbag with toilet requisites, and to put on her bonnet and heavy shawl.

When she was ready she went down to the wainscoted parlor, where she had had that first notable interview with Hanson, on which occasion he had told her of the departure of Harcourt and of his own claims upon her as his wife. It was here that he had shown her the marriage license and certificate and the Harcourt letter, all of which she believed to have been forged by Hanson. She made a thorough, and, to her apprehension, a hopeless search for the documents; and, to her surprise, she found them all together, thrust behind a picture of the Washington family that stood upon the mantelpiece.

Having secured them, she hurried to the front hall, where she found her aunt and uncle equipped for the journey, and two stalwart boatmen waiting orders about the luggage.

Roma then rang the hall bell, which soon brought 'Rusalem to her presence.

"Show these men up to my room and point out my traveling trunk," she said.

The old man stood stupidly staring at his mistress, dressed for her journey, and at her order to point out her traveling trunk.

"Good Lord! W'y, young mist'ess——"

But she cut him short with a peremptory command:

"Be quick! We wish to catch the four o'clock train from Snowden."

The old man scratched his head in hopeless per-

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plexity, beckoned to the boatmen in silence, and led the way upstairs in a state of mental imbecility.

In a few minutes dragging and bumping sounds were heard overhead, and the two men appeared, bearing the Saratoga trunk between them, and followed by the dazed old negro, who was muttering to himself:

"Nebber see no sich doin's in all de days ob my life. No, nebber! Young marr'ed lady gwine to 'sert her husban' jes' fo' gettin' little bit oberwent wid wine once in a way. In deir honeymoon, too! Wunner if Wilet knows it? Doane b'liebe as she do. Wunner wot she'll say to it?"

"What is that you are muttering to yourself, old man? Go and call your wife here; I wish to speak to you both at once," said Roma, as the three reached the foot of the stairs.

'Rusalem, shaking his head, went down the hall to the rear of the dwelling in search of Wilet.

The two boatmen bore the trunk from the house, and down the hill to the boat.

In a few minutes Wilet came into the hall, accompanied by 'Rusalem.

"Wot is dis my ole man been tellin' ob me, young mist'ess? He say, he do—but I doan b'liebe him—as you's gwine 'way," said Wilet, incredulously.

"Yes, I am going away with my aunt and uncle. I only wished to bid you and your husband good-by," Roma replied.

"Well, Lor'! Dis is a s'prise! How long yo' gwine be gone, young mist'ess, ma'am?"

"Certainly all this winter; probably all the year; possibly all my life."

"Oh, Lor', young mist'ess! Yo' wouldn't go fo' to be so onmairciful as to punish de po', young marster to dat extent, an' he layin' unconscionable on his bed? Take a 'sideration onto it, young mist'ess, an' forgib him only dis yere once, and maybe he won't nebber do so no mo'."

"Do not talk to me in that manner, Wilet. You forget yourself! Now listen to me: Take just the

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same care of the house that you have hitherto taken. Here are fifty dollars, with which to buy necessaries, if there are not already enough here. I will find means to communicate with you; and if you should want to write to me, you can get some one in Snowden to be your scribe, and you may direct your letter to the care of my attorney, Mr. Amos Merritt, City Hall, Washington."

"Yes, young mist'ess; yo' knows bes', o' course. Now, what shall I say to de young marster when he comes to hisse'f, please, ma'am?"

"Nothing."

"Nuffin'!"

"Nothing."

"But, Lor' bress my po' ole soul, young mist'ess, he'll ax w'ere yo' is, an' w'ere yo' went, an' how yo' goed, an' a fousan' questions; an' wot in de worl' is I gwine to say to him?"

"Anything you please, then; but nothing coming from me."

"Umph! Ain't she ingenus?" muttered the woman to herself.

"Come, my dear," exclaimed Mr. Gray. "We must really hurry if we wish to catch the four o'clock train. And remember, if we miss this train, there is not another that will stop at Goeberlin until to-morrow morning."

"Good-by, Wilet. Good-by, Jerusalem. Take care of yourselves," said Roma, offering her hand to each in turn.

"Good-by, young mist'ess. Yo's breakin' my po' ole heart, yo' is," said 'Rusalem, sniveling.

"Good-by, ma'am. I doan 'probe ob no sich doin's —I doan, indeed. I'se 'bleege to say so, young mist'ess, 'deed I is, bein' ob a good Methody sister. I 'bleege to bear my testimony, if it do 'fend yo'," said Wilet, dashing the tears from her eyes.

"It does not offend me. You will know better some day. Good-by," said Roma, kindly.

And she followed her aunt and uncle, who preceded her, from the house.

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The beautiful, clear sky that had ushered in the day, was now overclouded, and the clouds off to the northwest were heavy, lurid, threatening.

"I shouldn't wonder if we should have a storm," said Mr. Gray, looking back over his shoulder as they descended the hill.

Catching sight of the boathouse, Mrs. Gray said:

"I do wonder, Roma, that you did not order the old negro to launch a boat and take you across to Snowden."

"One of the first plans of escape that occurred to my mind, but that villain had locked up the boat-house and taken possession of the key. Oh, auntie, surely you must know that I have not had time to tell you half the wrongs, insults, outrages I have borne while the prisoner of that demon."

"I can well understand that, Roma."

They stopped talking to pick their way carefully down the rugged cliff.

At the foot they found the boat and the boatmen ready to push off.

Mr. Gray handed his wife and her niece into the boat. When they were all seated the boatment pushed off the boat, and laid themselves lustily to their oars.

"We are likely to have a storm," said Mr. Gray to the man who was steering.

"A storm, sir? Yes, sir! Look at that cloud, sir, off to the nor'e'st! Black as ink with copper-colored edges! Yes, sir! Such a storm as hasn't been seen in these parts since that of forty-nine! I memorize that storm well. It come up just as this one is coming. From that time to this I have never seen such a sky as now. Yes, sir. We'll catch it to-night," said the steersman.

"Was much damage done?" inquired Mr. Gray.

"'Damage,' sir? Well, I should say so. Why, sir, the fishermen's huts over there on the Sarpint were lifted up by the wind, and blown clear across the bay to Snowden beach, let alone all the wrack and ruin on the coast. Yes, sir! And I memorize——"

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Here the steersman launched into many reminiscences of the disastrous tempest and talked until they came in sight of Snowden.

Then he branched off into a eulogium of the new railroad, and all that it had done for the little seaside fishing town.

The end of the discussion brought them to the pier.

"Has the western train come in yet?" was the first question Mr. Gray asked of some loiterers on the wharf.

"Come and gone, sir. Five minutes ago," answered half a dozen voices at once.

"How provoking! We shall have to spend the night in the village," exclaimed Mr. Gray.

"Well, sir! there's one comfort! Yes, sir! You'll be safer here than on a railway train that will have a good chance of being blown over some bridge or cliff in the storm that is coming up there," said the steersman.

"Can you recommend me to the best hotel here?" inquired Mr. Gray.

"The best! Well, I should say! There is only one, sir. Old Harrisson's. That's a very good house! Old Harrisson ain't up to modern dodges to make money, or maybe he is too old to learn. Anyway, he keeps a clean, comfortable house, and a nice, plentiful table at very low rates."

Mrs. Gray handed the two ladies from the boat to the little pier, and stood looking around him. There was no carriage of any description in sight. There were no warehouses of any sort, nor even sheds. A more lonesome landing could scarcely be found anywhere. A long, grassy road led up to a cluster of small houses about an eighth of a mile distant.

Mr. Gray was inclined to ask:

"What is the business of this town? What supports it?"

But there was no time. The dark, threatening cloud was rising higher, and obscuring the sky. It was necessary to get under shelter before the storm should burst.

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"Where is Harrisson's?" he inquired.

"Straight ahead, sir. You can't miss it. There is only one street in the town, and this runs into it. Harrisson's is the biggest house on the street, and has a swinging sign across the sidewalk. Yes, sir."

"Thank you. Can you get a man and a wheelbarrow to take up this trunk?"

"Don't know about the wheelbarrow, sir. But two of our men can carry it up. I'll attend to it, sir, and come along of it."

"Thank you," said Mr. Gray, taking out his pocketbook.

"Never mind about that now, sir. We can settle it all together when we fetch the trunk."

"All right," said Mr. Gray. "Come, my dears."

And he led the way up the grassy road, followed by the two ladies walking abreast.

Ten minutes' walk brought them to the first houses of the straggling village street—a small farmhouse on the right, a small blacksmith's shop on the left—then fields on both sides of the road, then little detached houses, some of red brick, some of whitewashed boards, all in little gardens of their own; then more stubble fields and sere orchards; then more little houses in little gardens, but closer together, for they were now in the heart of the village street.

And here was Harrisson's—a double, two-story, substantial stone house with green blinds, an attic with a row of dormer windows in front, and a long "ell" running behind, and a row of tall, leafless Lombardy poplars in front.

The swinging sign hung out across the sidewalk, and announced to all concerned that this was:

"Harrisson's Hotel."

Mr. Gray led his party into the open door that led into a wide passage, on the right of which was a large, open window, looking into the office and bar.

Behind this window stood old Harrisson himself at his desk. He was a tall, gaunt, sallow-faced and

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deeply wrinkled old man, with iron-gray hair and gentle, sunken, brown eyes.

Mr. Gray introduced himself and party, and asked if they could be accommodated with rooms for the night.

"Happy to see you, sir; and very happy to see the ladies. Hope you find yourselves in good health. Yes, sir, we shall be very glad to make you comfortable here," said the host, slowly and courteously.

Then turning his head inward, he called:

"Here, Bill!"

A big, black man came from some part of the interior, and stood before his master.

"Show these ladies and this gentleman into the parlor. Then go and make up good fires in Nos. 1 and 3. And tell Ann Maria to see that the beds are aired and clean sheets put on. And, Bill, while you are up there, shut down the shutter of the skylight, and shut the shutters of all the spare rooms. There's a heavy storm rising."

"Yes, sah," said Bill to his master. "Dis way, sah!" he said to the guests.

"Is there anything you would like sent into the parlor, sir. Mint julep, apple toddy, milk punch, egg-nogg, anything of the sort for the ladies, or any liquor for yourself, sir?" inquired the host.

Mr. Gray looked at his companions, but they both shook their heads in silence, and he replied:

"No, thank you; but as we have not dined, we would be glad to have tea as soon as convenient, with some substantials added."

"You shall have it, sir. Bill, see to the gentleman's order," said the host.

The negro rubbed his forehead, and replied:

"Yes, sah; but I doan fink we'se got any ob dem sort o' eyestirs in de house."

"What sort, you blockhead?"

"Dem—dem—dem—wot-you-calls-ums. Dem stan-shells!" said the negro.

The grave man behind the window drew down the

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corners of his mouth to prevent an indecorous laugh, and then he said to his guest:

"Give your order in distinct terms, sir. There is plenty of cold beef and ham, and there is also plenty of venison and poultry uncooked, but that can soon be ready," he said, and laid a pencil and paper before his guest.

Mr. Gray looked at his companions.

"Vension," whispered Mrs. Gray.

"Yes," added Roma.

"That will do," said Mr. Gray, and he wrote the order and left it with the landlord.

Then he followed his black guide, and was followed in turn by the two ladies to the parlor, on the opposite side of the wide passage.

This was a corner front room, large, square, low ceiled, with four windows, two north, looking on the village street, two west, looking on an old garden. The windows were shaded with home-made, blue paper curtains, rolled halfway up; the walls were covered with a florid paper, with bunches of red roses, blue lilies and yellow holly-hocks on a pale green ground. The floor was covered with a gay carpet, with bunches of mammoth blue roses, green lilies and red sunflowers on a yellow ground; the sofa and chairs were covered with flowered chintz, the gayety and variety of the pattern outrivaling that of the wall paper and carpet, and defying all analysis.

The broad, open chimney place was filled with a fine oak-wood fire, adorned by brilliant brass andirons and brass fender, surmounted by a mantelpiece supporting a long mirror in a gilt frame and a pair of silver-plated branch candlesticks. It was rather a startling room to people of quiet tastes, yet it was in the highest style of the "ladies' parlor" in the country tavern of the time and place, and its splendors were the pride of the host and hostess.

Mrs. Gray threw herself down among the peacocks, hollyhocks, parrots and sunflowers of one chintz-covered armchair, while Roma sank into the other.

Mr. Gray, with the help of Bill, took off his ulster

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and lay down, and stretched his length of body out among the serpents, humming birds, dragons and Virginia creepers of the chintz-covered sofa. He was several years older than any of his party, and he was tired out with forty-eight hours of sudden, startling, harassing journeys from place to place, and he was not ashamed to own it.

CHAPTER XVIII

WRECK AND RUIN

"Good Lord, how the wind rattles the windows! One can't hear oneself think," Mrs. Gray complained.

"Shill I shet dese outside shetters, old mist'ess?" inquired Bill.

"'Old mistress! The impudence of the man!" muttered the pretty, little widow of thirty-seven summers. And she vouchsafed no answer.

"Yes, do shut them, or I think the glass will be smashed," said Roma, as one of the shutters was blown violently against the window with a bang that shook the house. Bill went out and, in his own words, "wrastled" with the shutters until he had fastened them securely.

Then he went to order the "tea, with something substantial," which, in this instance, resolved itself into venison steaks.

Our party rested in the gay "ladies' parlor." They needed rest sorely. If all the serpents and lizards, scorpions and dragons that adorned the chintz cover of the sofa on which the Honorable Joel lay had been alive and venomous, instead of being only pictured and harmless, he would have lain there still; he could not have stirred up strength enough to rise and fly.

"After all, I am not sorry that we missed the train. We need a comfortable night's rest," he said.

"Nor I," added his wife, "for though the sleeping cars are really very nice, they are not natural, and

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two successive nights in them are rather trying to one not used to such things. And I reckon, Roma, you are not sorry to rest in peace to-night."

"I! Why, auntie, I have not been to bed since Monday night, and this is Thursday evening. I have not even taken my clothes off since I put them on on Tuesday morning. Now, for the very first time in my life, I begin to know what the feeling of fatigue is like. Yes, I shall be glad to lie down and sleep. Yet how can I sleep! Ah, what a hard heart I have that I should think of rest while Will's fate is unknown to me! I wonder my heart cannot break, nor my brain go mad! Verily, I am a woman of stone, as you called me, auntie!"

"Marble, my dear—marble, not stone. I never said anything so rude as that," Mrs. Gray corrected.

Roma smiled sadly, made no comment, but presently said:

"I think I should go mad now, auntie, if it were not for one thing; for now I feel the horror of the uncertainty about Will's fate as I never felt it, never realized it before."

"How was that, my dear?"

"Auntie, the deadly peril in which I have passed the last two days and nights—peril of fate so much worse than death, and the imminent necessity of unceasing vigilance—the probability that I should be compelled to kill a man in self-defense—oh, auntie, all these horrors prevented me from realizing the full misery of the uncertainty about Will's fate. But now! but now!"

"Well, my dear, now! You are better off than you were then. You are safe yourself."

"Yes, auntie, but I feel I should go mad if it were not for one anchor that holds the craft of my reason safe in this moral tempest."

"And what is that, my dear?"

"My faith in our Heavenly Father. I know this for a certainty. Will Harcourt is one of our Father's children, and whether he is alive or—dead," she added the last word with a slight tremor in her voice—

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"whether he has been foully murdered and his mortal body sunk in the depths of the sea, or whether he has lost his reason and wandered away to unknown places—wherever he is, however he is, he is certainly in our Father's house, and cannot be lost from it, and under our Father's care and cannot lose or forfeit it! And I know for a certainty that, horribly severed as we are now, stretching out our arms toward each other, in the double darkness of ignorance and desperation, vainly, as we do now, we shall yet meet again, if not in this world, then in another one; and whenever or wherever we meet again, we shall meet never more to part. This assurance enables me to bear up," said Roma, solemnly.

"My dear, I wish to ask you one question: Has it ever occurred to you that Mr. Harcourt may have been a party to this treachery by which——"

"Auntie! Mrs. Gray! Never hint such a base suspicion again! For if you do, by all my hopes of heaven, I will never speak to you more!" indignantly exclaimed Roma.

"There—there—there! My dear girl, I meant no offense to you, and no accusation against Will Harcourt. I only put a question——" began Ruth, in alarm.

"Never put it again, then," curtly commanded Roma.

"I will not. But, you see, here's Joe has infected me somewhat with his pessimism. He is never surprised at anything done by anybody. He never says: 'Who'd have thought it?' about the most startling things. Once I tried him. I said: 'Joe, I am engaged to you, Roma is engaged to Will Harcourt. Now, wouldn't it surprise you if I was to jilt you and cut Roma out, and elope with Will?' 'No,' he said, 'it wouldn't!' Now, what do you think of that?"

Whatever Roma thought of that was not then uttered, for at that juncture Bill entered the parlor and announced:

"De tea is yeddy, ladies! Yes, sir, de tea is waitin'!"

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Mr. Gray slowly reared from the sofa and shook himself together.

Ruth and Roma arose and laid off their shawls and bonnets and followed the black waiter to the tea table, where they were soon joined by Mr. Gray. The dining room where the table was set was on the other side of the wide passage in the rear of the building. It was also a corner room with four windows—two south windows, looking into the back yard; two east windows, looking into a vacant lot. Yet the wind here was as boisterous as in the northwest corner, beating, banging and slapping the shutters and shaking the windows. It entered at every crevice in the room. Even the glorious wood fire in the chimney place could scarcely keep it warm. The roar of the sea was now mingled with the roar of wind, and the noise grew deafening.

"What a terrible night it is going to be!" said Joel Gray, as the party took their seats at the table.

"'Going' to be? Is, you mean, Joe. If it gets much worse than this, there will hardly be a chimney or a roof left standing. It is a perfect tornado," said Ruth, as she took a cup of tea from the hands of the waiter.

"So it be, ole mist'ess. So it be! Nebber see such a wind in all my born days! Dere'll be wrack an' ruin by sea an' lan' dis awful night, I tell yo' good, I do, ole mist'ess," said Bill.

"'Ole mist'ess again!" muttered Ruth, in suppressed wrath. "Joe, if you don't turn that black idiot out of the room, I will!"

"You may leave us now, my man. We can wait on ourselves," said good-natured Joel Gray, with a humorous smile.

"All yight, ole marse. Yo' kin ying ef yo' want anyfing," replied Bill, with a polite pull at his wool and duck of his head as he left the room.

"I never saw such an animal! I hate an idiot!" angrily exclaimed Ruth.

"No, don't; pity one, my dear. The man only called

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you 'ole mist'ess' in respect to the wife of 'ole marse,' " laughed Joel Gray.

"I don't care! It was insolent!" exclaimed Ruth.

"He meant it to be reverential,' said Joel.

"Worse and worse! Am I such an ancient fossil as to be treated with reverential worship instead of polite—polite——" She hesitated for a word.

"Admiration? No, you are not. You are young and pretty—only you happen to be the wife of an ancient fos——"

"Now, Joe, hold your tongue. You are laughing at me, and you are much worse than the black man."

"I am mute. Let me help you to some venison," said Joel. And the subject was changed.

When they had supped well, they returned to the parlor, which Bill had lighted brilliantly with a kerosene lamp on the side table and a pair of sperm candles on the mantelpiece.

"Now, ole mist'ess," he said, "venebber yo' wishes fo' to 'tire, yo' yoom is yeddy."

Seeing his vain little wife's annoyance, Joel Gray said:

"See here, my man, this lady is Mrs. Gray. I wish you to remember it."

"I know dat, old marse. But much obleeged to yo', sah, fo' offerin' me de honor, but I ain't dat impiddent to call a rale lady by her own name, jes' like rale ladies do call one anoder. No, sah! I'se impiddent 'nuff on 'casions, but I ain't nebber dat impiddent. No, sah. I calls de reberent, 'spectable ole lady my ole mist'ess. An' I call de han'some young lady my young mist'ess, an' I call yo', sah, my ole marse, to command. Yes, sah, Willum Keech Chissilly, w'ich is my name, sah, ain't spiled by de war, nor likewise de 'mancerpation. I 'mancerpated my own ole marse, an' I nebber mean to 'mancerpate de good maners he teached to me. No, sah. Any orders, sah?"

"You may show us the way to our rooms," said Mr. Gray, suppressing an inclination to laugh.

"All yight, ole marse. Dis way, ole mist'ess," said

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the waiter, with a bow, as he waved his hand for the ladies and gentleman to precede him up the broad stairs.

Charming rooms they found above, upholstered in maple wood and white dimity. No carpet on the floor, but little rugs laid before the fires and beside the beds. I have described both rooms in the same terms, for they were exactly alike, down to the smallest detail of the pattern of the pincushions that adorned the toilet tables. And they were front rooms directly opposite to each other, with the hall between, the Grays' room being over the hotel office, Roma's room over the parlor. They were corner rooms, also, having each two windows in front and two at the sides. Their aspect was cold, notwithstanding the great wood fires.

And, oh, how the wind raved, and roared, and shook, and crashed around the house. Rain came down in torrents, and lashed the outer walls as though it would have driven them in, and through all the thundering of the sea upon the shore might be heard.

"Good Lord!" cried Mrs. Gray, as she parted with Roma at the door of the girl's chamber. "I begin to know and to have a realizing sense of how old Noah's flood must have come on. With just such howling and blowing, roaring and dashing as this. Well, good-night, my dear. 'Good'-night, indeed! As if anybody could expect this to be a good night. I hope you'll sleep. But I know I shall not.

And with this the lady crossed the passage and entered her own room.

Worn out with fatigue as our party was, not one of them slept much that night.

The storm rose higher and higher as the night passed by. It was at its height about midnight.

The howling and shrieking of the wind, the roaring and thundering of the sea, the lashing and slashing of the rain, the crash of rended trees and timbers, the rattle of falling chimneys, the whirr of roofs whirled through the air—these and many other in-

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definable but most horrible, discordant, distracting and deafening noises "murdered sleep" that memorable night.

Roma lay wide awake, listening, not with fear—she was a woman without fear—but with expectation of having the roof blown off the house, or the house itself lifted up and borne away on the blast. She listened also in expectancy of hearing the landlord or his family up and making preparations to escape. But no other sounds except the multitudinous, chaotic shrieks, howls, roars and crashes of the tornado reached her ears. It seemed so long, time seemed to stand still in awe, nothing seemed to move but the fiercely fighting elements, until midnight; and after that there came brief intervals of peace between the convulsions of nature, the paroxysms of the storm, that were like the last throes of a sentient, expiring planet. The intervals increased in length; the paroxysms decreased in violence; and, slowly, slowly the storm subsided in low, retreating growls and moans until near the dawn of day.

"Silence, like a poultice, came
To heal the wounds of sound."

Then Roma fell asleep, and slept soundly to make up for three nights' loss of rest, until she was aroused by a knocking at her door and the voice of Mrs. Gray calling:

"Roma! Roma, my dear! Wake up! We have only an hour to get ready for the train, and breakfast will be on the table in fifteen minutes!"

The girl sprang from her bed, and went and opened the door to admit her aunt.

The light from the front window of the hall showed her at once that the sky was clear and the sun was shining. Mrs. Gray, already dressed for breakfast, stood at the door.

"Good-morning, auntie. Come in. I will soon be ready. Was there much damage done by the storm

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last night?" inquired Roma, as she stood aside and held the door open to let the lady enter.

"'Damage!'" exclaimed the latter, hurrying in and closing the door after her. "'Damage!' Open your windows and see! The place looks like the day after the Day of Judgment. A wrecked world!"

"Oh, I hope you exaggerate," Roma said.

"'Exaggerate!' Well, look and see for yourself," the lady answered.

Roma went to the front window and threw it open.

"Good Heaven!" she cried.

"I told you so!" Mrs. Gray exclaimed.

It was a wretched sight. The ground was strewn with wrecks—uprooted trees, fallen walls, sheds, segments of fences, furniture broken; other sights too numerous to record.

"Many of the people are homeless this day," Mrs. Gray began to explain. "Those who have friends in reach with houses over their heads have gone to them; others have gone to the church and to the schoolhouse, both of which have been opened and heated up for the sufferers. Neighbors who have escaped the calamity have been busy collecting and preparing food and clothing for them. But hurry up and dress; we can talk while you are doing it."

"Oh, my dear Aunt Ruth, it seems so heartless to go away while our neighbors are suffering so much," said Roma, as she hastily began to make her morning toilet.

"But we have got to go. Joe and I, with our checks, must sail for Liverpool on Wednesday, and we cannot leave you here at the mercy of that wretch's machinations. No, we must go; but we will do what we can for them before we go. Joe has subscribed two hundred dollars—more than he can afford, poor soul—I know that."

"I must write a check before I go. Ah, auntie, this is the occasion on which one thanks Heaven for the possession of wealth. Who is taking up the subscriptions?"

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"The Rev. Dr. Ralph Paulding, the local minister. But, my dear, hurry! hurry!"

Roma soon dressed, and then together the two ladies left the room and went downstairs.

Mr. Gray met them at the foot.

"Will we have time to eat our breakfast?" inquired his wife.

"Plenty; there is no hurry now. The railway track is partially covered with a heap of sand, and it will take some hours to remove it; so you see we are bound here for perhaps half a day," replied the Honorable Joel.

"Is that so? How do you know?" inquired Ruth, with much regret and some hopeful incredulity. "It may be a mere rumor," she added.

I have just come from the depot, where I went to make inquiries.'

"It is true, then. And here we are in a trap. And this is Friday, and we must go to Goblin Hall, and from there to New York in time to take the steamer for Liverpool on Wednesday, Joe! It will be a close shave!"

"My dear, it can be done. Now let us go to breakfast."

And to breakfast they went; nor did the calamity of the storm prevent them from enjoying the fine coffee, rich buckwheat cakes, hot rolls, fried ham and eggs and broiled chickens that loaded the table.

After breakfast, as they went out into the hall, they were met by the landlord, who said:

"Sir and ladies, would you like to go through the skylight and view the effects of the storm from the roof? I have got a good spyglass at your service."

The three friends looked at each other in silent inquiry, and then Mr. Gray answered for the party:

"I thank you, Mr. Harrisson; I think we should."

"I hope, sir," said Roma, courteously, "that you have suffered nothing from the storm?"

"Thank you, ma'am; I ought not to complain, seeing what my neighbors have to bear; but the top of the southwest chimney was blown down and crushed

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in the corner of the roof, and shook down all the plastering in the garret room under it; and my woodshed has been blown away, and the roof of my bowling alley carried off."

"I am very sorry to hear it, Mr. Harrisson."

"Glad it was no worse, ma'am. This way, ladies."

And the landlord led the way up two pairs of stairs to the attic hall, in the midst of which a stout step-ladder gave ascent to the trapdoor of the skylight.

They went up, preceded by Mr. Harrisson, and stood upon the long and narrow level, on the top of the shelving roof.

A wild scene of chaos lay beneath them.

On the east lay the sea, dark and rough. On the west the land scattered over with the wrecks of the wind—fragments of collapsed houses, fallen fences, shattered carts and smashed furniture.

The wind had ceased to war upon the waves, but the sea had not yet recovered from its furious indignation, which was slowly subsiding in sobs and heaves.

Mr. Harrisson stood up, adjusting his spyglass before handing it over to his guests. He put it up to his eye, and pointed it out to sea to try its powers. Suddenly he cried out:

"Good Lord! The Sarpent is sunk all but its head. That there has never happened before; no, not in my time. Look, sir."

Mr. Gray took the glass, adjusted it, took a view, and exclaimed:

"By Jove, it is a fact! The Isle of Storms is submerged, except the highest part of the hill."

Then he passed the glass to Roma, who took a look, and corroborated the report of the two men.

Mrs. Gray asked for the glass, and surveyed the scene.

"The manor house is standing," she said, "but I cannot see whether any damage has been done to it. Could either of you?"

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They all told her "no," that the distance was too great to observe details.

In a short while they left the roof and went downstairs.

Then Roma called for pen and ink, and wrote a check for the relief of the sufferers from the storm. She made it payable to the Rev. Ralph Paulding, and signed it with her full name—Romaine Guyon Fronde Harcourt, and handed it to Mr. Harrisson to be delivered to the clergyman.

As soon as the landlord had left the room with the paper, Mrs. Gray, who had been looking over Roma's shoulder while she wrote, suddenly exclaimed:

"There!"

"Where? What do you mean?" inquired Roma.

"I forgot to tell you until this very moment. But —oh, Lord!—so many things have happened! So much has had to be remembered that I should never have thought of it again if I had not seen you write your new name."

"But what is it?" inquired Roma.

"Here! Read this!" replied Mrs. Gray; and she took from her pocketbook a printed slip cut from a newspaper, and handed it to Roma.

It was the fraudulent marriage notice that had been inserted in all the Washington dailies of November 15th.

Mrs. Gray watched Roma while she read it, expecting some outburst of indignation. Long as she had known the girl, she never gave her credit for her almost immovable self-command.

Roma read the notice through, and returned the slip to her aunt, saying quietly:

"Yes, I know. He told me of this. It is only a part of his base but vain scheme to bind me."

"And that is all you have got to say! Roma, you are adamant! That is what you are—adamant!" exclaimed the matron.

Before the young lady could defend herself from this charge—if, indeed, she would have cared to do

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it—Mr. Gray, who had been down to the waterside, entered hastily and said:

"What do you think I found blown ashore?"

"What?" inquired both the ladies.

"Why, the boathouse of the Isle of Storms, with all the boats cable-chained to their staples; but the house was a wreck, and so was every boat. The tangle of chains only kept them together."

"Then," said Roma, "that villain is a prisoner on the island. He cannot get away. No steamboat runs here after the fifteenth."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Mrs. Gray. "I am glad, as far as that reprobate is concerned! But the poor negroes! I hope they won't suffer. But what will they do if they get out of provisions?"

"They will not exhaust the necessaries of life, at least. They have plenty there—poultry, sheep, cattle, breadstuffs, and all winter vegetables, to say nothing of fish and water fowl. They will be well off, nor will they mind the isolation. They seldom care to leave the island. But as for that criminal, he will feel the seclusion, which he must bear until the boats begin to run next spring."

"But they never land at the island."

"No, but they send out a boat to take passengers off whenever a signal is hoisted on the Crest."

Mr. Gray left the two ladies still talking of the entrapped villain, and went out to inquire into the progress made in clearing the railway track, where a large force of laborers were hard at work. He did not return until the early dinner hour. Then he reported that the "job" promised to be a long one.

After dinner he went out again, stayed all the afternoon, and only returned to the early tea.

"Well, shall we have another night here?" anxiously inquired Mrs. Gray.

"No. Another night in the sleeping cars! The road will be ready for the eight o'clock train, which will reach Goeberlin at five in the morning," he replied.

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"And by the time we get our tea and put on our wraps, it will be time to start."

"Yes."

In two hours from that our party were on board the night express from Snowden, speeding west toward Goeberlin, where they arrived in the early dawn.

CHAPTER XIX

CAUGHT IN HIS OWN TRAP

After the departure of Roma and her friends from the island, the two negroes, 'Rusalem and Wilet, stood on the front steps watching the receding boat until it diminished to a mere speck and passed out of sight.

Then they turned and looked at each other, sighed, and spoke for the first time.

"Seems like dere was a sturm yizing," said 'Rusalem, looking toward the northeast, where heavy clouds were gathering.

"Yes, ole man. Dat's so. Sturm's yizing all youn', outside an' inside. Won' dere be a harrycane w'en de young marse wake up an' fine de young mist'ess gone? Whip you hosses!"

"Umph! Umph!" assented 'Rusalem.

"Caze," continued Wilet, "yo' knows an' I knows w'en gen'men as have been overtuk, wakes up, dey mos' in gen'al has a splittin' headache an' a berry bad temper! An' wot will it be wid de young marse, yo' reckon?"

"Umph—umph!" was all 'Rusalem replied; but the amount of expression of dire foreboding he contrived to put into those two syllables cannot be conveyed in words.

"Come in, ole man! Doane stan' dere in de win' douten yo' hat. Yo'll be catchin' newrages in yo' head ag'in. Come in. And yo' better go an' see arter

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de young marse, an' keep his fire up. Gwine to be cole to-night."

With these words they re-entered the house, and closed and fastened the door.

Wilet went to her kitchen, and 'Rusalem climbed the stairs to the "young marster's" room.

He unlocked the door and entered. The place was nearly dark, being partly lighted only by the smoldering wood fire and the low, level rays of the setting sun that gleamed through the interstices of the closed Venetian blinds.

The sleeper lay unconscious on the mattress on the floor; but no longer motionless. He was uneasily rolling and muttering in his sleep.

"Gwine to wake up p'esently. Den won' dere be de debil's own carcus? Umph—Umphe!" murmured 'Rusalem, solemnly shaking his head. "Mus' fetch some more wood, and put on dat fire, too. It's a-gettin' dull."

He left the room, but forgot to lock the door after him.

A few minutes after he had gone, the tossing and muttering dreamer on the mattress slowly raised himself to a sitting position, glared around him with bloodshot eyes, still evidently only half conscious of his surroundings, and half dreaming.

Muttering something to the effect of not being "foiled," he scrambled to his feet, reeled, tottered, recovered himself, made a plunge toward the door, fell against the wall, righted himself again, and holding by the wall, found the door, fumbled over the lock until, "more by good luck than good management," he opened it. His aim was the opposite door, opening into Roma's deserted room. He made a plunge to reach it, fell against it and through it, for the lock was off, gathered himself up, and holding by chairs and tables and by the wall, he finally reached the bed and fell upon it, tearing the canopy down as he sank. In two minutes he had relapsed into stupor.

Meanwhile 'Rusalem "took his time" down in the

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kitchen, drank a large bowl of shin soup, that Wilet had prepared for the dinner that they had not yet had a chance to eat, followed it up by a heavy plate of bacon, cabbage, and corn dumplings, and finished off with a big bowl of coffee.

Then 'Rusalem remembered the "young marster's" fire, and went into the adjoining woodshed and filled his arms with pine knots and cones, whose resinous qualities would soon, he knew, kindle the dullest hardwood fire into brilliant blazes.

He took them upstairs and crowded them under and on top of the oak logs. But it was not until they had burst into a blaze and illuminated the whole room that he missed the sleeper from the mattress.

Then he stared and scratched his head in silence for some moments.

He never thought of looking into other rooms. His one idea was that the victim of drink had "done himself a mischief"—"made 'way with himself."

"Now won't I catch it f'om my ole 'oman for leabin' ob dat do' open?" he exclaimed, as he ran out of the room and down the steps as fast as age and rheumatism would let him.

"He's done gone!" he howled, bursting into the kitchen, where Wilet stood at the side table washing up the dishes.

"Who done gone? Wot de matter long o' yo', ole man?" demanded Wilet, wiping away at the dish in her hand.

"De young marse!" gasped 'Rusalem, dropping into a chair.

"Gone? De young marse gone? Whey he gone?" demanded Wilet, stopping work in the intensity of her interest.

"Dunno whey! Done hev hisse'f out'n de windy or into de sea, or sumwhuz!" moaned 'Rusalem.

"How he get out, anyways?" severely demanded Wilet.

"Oh, Lor'! Oh, Lor'! I did forget an' leabe dat yere do' unlock'. Dat's de way he mus' 'a' got out.

"Yo' did, did you'?" sternly replied Wilet. "An'

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now I s'pose yo' know how, ef de young marse comes to his deaf frough yo' a-leabin' ob his do' open, it's de same as murder, an' yo'll be hung fo' it, doane yo'?'

"I s'pose I will," whimpered 'Rusalem, in meek despair.

"But is yo' sho he's lef' de house?"

"I ain't sho ob nuffin but he's done gone," whined 'Rusalem.

"Let's go an' s'arch, anyways," said practical Wilet, wiping her hands in her apron, and leading the way from the kitchen, followed by 'Rusalem.

They looked into all the lower rooms first, and without finding anyone.

Then they went upstairs. Wilet went first of all into Roma's vacated room, which, with its four windows open, was still light enough in the after-glow to enable her to see at a glance the form of Hanson lying across the bed where he had fallen upon the wreck of the white canopy.

"Dere he is now! Wot fool yo' is, 'Rusalem! 'Clare yo' ain't got no mo' sense dan de babe unboan! W'yn't yo' look in yere 'fo' yo' raise sich a 'larm an' skur me out'n my senses?" sharply demanded Wilet.

"Oh, honey, 'caze I were skurred out'n my own, so I was, an' didn't know wot I was 'bout. Well, t'ank de Lor', he's safe so far! An'—an'——"

"An yo' wone be hung fo' him," added Wilet.

"No; but I were gwine to say as I would take better care ob him in futur," 'Rusalem explained.

"Yo' better! Dat's all, man! Yo' better, ef yo' walleys ob yo' neck. An' now help me to straighten him out a little," said Wilet.

Between them they gently rolled the sleeper toward the back of the bed, drew the fallen canopy from under him, and with some difficulty, standing on chairs placed upon tables, succeeded in restoring the canopy to its high place, fastening its rings in the hooks from the ceiling.

Then they got down and straightened out the sleeper, drawing his head and shoulders upon the

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pillows, and then, as he lay on the outside of the bed, covering his form with an extra counterpane which Wilet brought from another room.

Hanson slept through all this gentle handling, only proving his half consciousness of any attentions by smiling and murmuring in an idiotic way.

"He's in some 'fool's pa'dise' ob a dream now, po' soul. Wanderin' in flowery groves ob bliss, wid de young mist'ess on his arm. He! he! he! Kik! kik! kik! Wot a fool!" laughed Wilet.

"He is dat. Jes like fool! Mumblin' to hisse'f, an' callin' po' ole nigger man like me his 'sweet lub!' Is I a 'sweet lub'? He! he! he! Kik! kik! kik!" giggled 'Rusalem.

"He ain't seein' ob yo'. He's a dreamin'. An' there he goes ag'in! Callin' ob me a hebbenly angel! S'pose I fink he means me? No! He's a-dreamin'," said Wilet, who was tucking the top of the counterpane closely around the neck and shoulders of the sleeper.

It was not yet quite dark. It was but five o'clock, and the sun had set but a few minutes before, yet 'Rusalem took time by the forelock, replenished the fire, lighted the night lamp, and then went to close the window shutters; but as he hoisted the sashes, and loosened the catches that held the shutters back to the outside walls, the high wind took them with such fierce slaps and bangs that the old man could scarcely hold them tight enough to secure the fastenings.

"Glory be to Moses, wot a win'!" he exclaimed, panting for breath after his final exploit in closing the last shutter.

"Yo' go all ober de place now, old man, an' fas'en up ebery windy tight. Ef de win' do get in dis house to-night it'll take de ruff clean off. 'Member dat year w'en de ole barn were lif' yight up offen de groun' an' blow'd cl'ar 'way 'cross de bay to Snowden?" asked Wilet.

"Ah, yah! dat was a night, ole woman!" said 'Rusalem.

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"An' dis is anoder night, ole man! So yo' go an' 'pare fo' it."

Jerusalem unwillingly reared his tall form from the easy-chair into which he had sunk, and crept out of the room.

"Come back yere w'en yo' get frough," Wilet called after him.

"All right," he responded.

The woman then took her seat by the sleeper, who was still murmuring and smiling.

"As in delighted visions."

"Dat po' soul is dreamin' ob de young mist'ess! He is, fo' sho'! He's a-dreamin' as he has made up long o' her. She's de 'sweet lub' an' 'de hebbenly angel,' as he is talkin' about. Lor'! couldn't 'a' been me an' my ole man! We's well 'nuff in our way, but Lor'! we ain't sweet lubs an' hebbenly angels—not much we ain't! But de young mist'ess is, w'en she ain't in her tempers. Ain't she a beautiful angel o' light! But Lor'! ain't she got a temper! To fink of she goin' off an' 'sertin' o' her own dear lor' an' marster free days arter maridge, jes' caze he was a little bit obertuk 'long o' liquor, like any gen'man might 'a' been! Won't dere be a carcus w'en he wakes! He's a-dreamin' now as he's made up wid her. Dey do say dreams goes by contraries; an' it do seem so in dis case. He's dreamin' lubly dreams 'bout her, an' callin' ob her sweet angel an' hebbenly lub, an' all dat; an' he'll wake up an fine it quite contrary to all dat. He'll fine as she has gone an' 'saken him, 'dout eben leabin' a messidge fo' him. Oh, Lor,! won't dere be de debbil to pay, an' no pitch hot!"

Wilet's ruminations were cut short by the re-entrance of 'Rusalem.

"Has yo' fas'en' all de windys good?" she asked.

"Yes, I has," he answered, dropping into the easy-chair before the fire.

"Sho yo' hasn't forgot no windy?"

"Yes, sho'."

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"Well, den yo' stay yere an watch de young marster w'ile I goes down to finish washin' up my dishes an' cl'arin' up my kitchen," said Wilet.

And she left the room.

'Rusalem sat a long time motionless, staring into the fire.

"Mighty lonesome, sittin' yere by myse'f! Eben young marse has stop talkin' in his sleep. Wonner ef it would be any harm fo' me to take a little smoke? I'll wenter, anyhow," he said to himself.

And he lighted his pipe, and took a seat on a footstool in the corner of the hearth, and even bent down his head so that the smoke might go up the chimney.

Half an hour passed so, and then the sleeper began to awake. He opened his eyes and looked around. He saw only the empty room; his watcher, crouching in the chimney corner was out of his line of vision.

"She has left the room," he said to himself, and then he tried to collect his thoughts. His mind was confused, and mingled dreams with realities.

He vaguely remembered the scene of violence that really had occurred when in drunken mania he had broken into that room; he remembered his dream of a perfect reconciliation, and of blissful hours of love, as a reality. He believed that he had subdued Roma to his will, that she had accepted him as her husband, and he thought that she had just left the room. He lifted up his head to look through the open door that led into the passage to see if he could catch sight of her. And now his head seemed bursting with pain. He fell back on his pillow, and turned himself on his side.

In looking down his eyes lighted on the crouching form of the old negro in the chimney corner.

"Who the deuce are you?" he called out.

The old man started violently, but gathered himself together, stood up and answered:

"It's only me, young marster; yes, sah, ole 'Rusalem, sah. Hope yo's better, young marster."

"What the devil are you doing here?—Oh, my head!"

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"Yes, sah! A-waitin' on yo', sah, case yo' want anyfing, yes, sah."

"How dare you come in here without being called? —Heavens! how my head throbs!"

'Rusalem hesitated and stammered, but was interrupted by another question:

"Where is your mistress?"

'Rusalem fell to trembling. This query was more alarming than the other one. He dared not answer it.

"Do you hear me? Where's your mistress?" again demanded Hanson.

"Ya—ya—yas, sah! De young mist'ess, sah! Yas, sah! I hears yo', sah!" stammered 'Rusalem.

"Why the devil don't you answer, then? Where is she?"

"Yas, sah! I—I jes' fink de young madam has stepped out a bit, sah. Yas, sah."

"Go and find her, then, you idiot, and give her my compliments, and say that I should like to see her here."

"Ya—yas, sah. Sartainly, sah. Yas, sah," stammered the negro, hastily leaving the room, from which he was glad to escape.

"I call that a great victory!" muttered Hanson to himself, his half-addled brain still mingling the dream of his conquest with the fact of his drunken violence. "I have read in some old author, or other, that women love to be mastered, and worship their masters. By my resolute will I have mastered this proud dame, and I mean to keep the mastership. She shall never get the upper hand of me again. That story of the Roman youth and the Sabine maids was as true to nature as to history. Even truer, perhaps, to the first than to the last. There is a lesson in it. My Roma is a lioness. And I had to woo her.

"'As the lion woos his bride.'

And what an achievement the wooing and winning of my wife was from first to last! The stroke of diplomacy by which I got her hand! The resolution by which I won her against her hatred.

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"'Was ever woman in such humor wooed?
Was ever woman in such humor won?'

By the thought of my brain, the strength of my will, and the fire of my love, I have brought the proud one to my feet. I have made her my own, my willing slave."

While the confused egotist was exulting in his hallucinations, old Jerusalem went down to the kitchen to take counsel with Wilet.

"He have come to hisse'f, an' is 'quiring fo' de young mist'ess," he said.

"Oh! An' wot yo' tell him?"

"I tell him—I tell him—I tell him how de young madam had jes' step out a minit. Oh, fo' de Lor's sake, Wilet, 'oman come yight up long o' me an' pacify de young marse!" pleaded 'Rusalem.

"He'll jes' take our scalps off w'en he fine out she's goed away," said Wilet, shaking her head.

"But 'ow kin he blame we? We couldn' 'vent de young madam f'om goin' ef she choose to go!" pleaded 'Rusalem.

"Dat ain't no 'sideration long o' w'ite people like him. He'll be mad as fire, an' sho to take his spite out offen somebody, an' dere's on'y you an' me to take it offen."

"Oh, Lor'! Oh, Lor'!" cried 'Rusalem.

"Dere now! Doane yo' year him yinging dat bell like a house afire? Come 'long, ole man. Might's well face wot we's got to face, fuss as las'!" exclaimed Wilet, wiping her hands and leading the way from the kitchen.

When they reached Hanson's bedside, they found him in a sitting position, holding his head with both hands.

"Well, where's your mistress?" he demanded of the old man.

"A—a—a—she's jes'—yes, sah. Wilet will tell yo', sah. Wilet knows," replied 'Rusalem, following the tradition of his sex from Adam down, and shifting the responsibility upon "the woman."

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"Well, then, where is your mistress and why doesn't she come to me when I send for her?" he inquired, turning to the colored woman.

"Yes, young marse; sartingly, sah. Dat's bery true. Settin' up late is bad fo' de head, so I jes' 'pared a good, strong, hot cup o' coffee fo' yo', young marse, w'ich it will do yo' a 'mazin' sight ob good. Shill I fetch it up to yo', young marse?" inquired Wilet, rather inconsequently, after his question. But he scarcely perceived the inconsequence.

His brain was not yet very clear, his head was aching fearfully, and the suggestion of the coffee was most welcome to him.

"Yes," he answered, still holding his head with both hands, "bring it to me at once. And tell your mistress I am waiting for her. She must learn never to keep me waiting," he added to himself.

Wilet, glad of a short reprieve, left the room, and, after an absence of a few minutes, returned with the coffee, which she had already prepared.

"Where is your mistress?" he asked again, as he took the cup from her hand.

"Yas, sah—sartinly. But, yo' see, I was so anxious to fetch de coffee up quick so as to ease yo' po' head, dat I—I didn't see de madam any whey 'bout, an' didn't jes' take de time to look fo' her. D'ink yo' coffee, young marse. It'll do yo' heaps o' good."

Put off again with a subterfuge, the unsuspicious, half-addled victim sipped his Java, and failed to follow up his questions.

"Open the windows and let daylight in. What do you mean by keeping them closed so late in the morning as this must be?" he said, between his sips.

"Mornin', marse? W'y, it's dark night—pitch dark," replied Wilet.

"Night?' Absurd. I don't believe you. Open the windows there, you—Sambo!"

'Rusalem understood the orders as being given to himself, and, however he may have secretly resented being called "Sambo," he promptly obeyed.

But the furious wind wrested the open shutters

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from the grasp of the negro, and slapped and banged them about with such force and violence as nearly to jerk his old arms out of joint.

"Shut the blinds!" cried Hanson, holding his head, that the blows of the wind seemed to split.

'Rusalem again obeyed, but muttered, sotto voce:

"It was yo' as tole me to open ob 'em."

"It is night, then. What o'clock is it?" inquired Hanson, turning to Wilet.

"It were yeight o' clock by de hall clock w'en I fotch up de coffee, young marse," she answered.

"Indeed! How long have I slept?"

"F'om de time yo' went to bed, young marse; an' yo' know bes' what time dat was, down to dis time w'en yo' wake up, an' yo' know wot time dis is."

Hanson held his head and tried to think. The coffee had partly cleared his brain. He remembered the scene of violence on the preceding night, and knew it for a fact. But he began to doubt the reality of his imaginary reconciliation with Roma, and to fear that it was only a very vivid dream.

"Where is your mistress?" he now inquired, in a much more subdued tone. "Now, see here, both of you, no more prevarication, for I will not have it. Where is your mistress?"

Neither of the negroes answered. They only looked at each other in dismay.

Hanson's worst thought was that Roma had locked herself in some room, and refused to receive any message from him, and that the negroes feared, or disliked, to tell him so. He had no suspicion of the real state of the case.

"Do you intend to tell me, or do you not? Answer!" he exclaimed, so sternly that both 'Rusalem and Wilet hastened to reply in a breath.

"Lord knows. I dunno, sah."

"Ef it was de las' word I had to speak in dis worl', I couldn' tell you, young marse."

"What do you mean? She must be in the house!" cried Hanson, beginning to fear he knew not what.

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"No, sah, she ain't in de house," said Wilet, driven to desperation.

"What? You don't mean that your lady is outdoors in such a storm as this?"

"I hopes not, sah. I hope she's indoors, sumwhurze."

"What do you mean, then?" demanded Hanson, turning paler than he was before.

"Young madam ain't nowhurze on de islan', sah! She done gone away! We was feared to tell you so too sudden, sah; fear it would gib yo' too much ob a shock, an' yo' not so berry well, sah! But de young mist'ess done lef' an' gone away, sah!" said Wilet.

"You infernal old hypocrite!" cried Hanson, turning on 'Rusalem, who stood trembling in his shoes. "Did I not order you, under the penalty of my severest displeasure, never to take out the boat for your mistress?"

"I nebber done it, sah! An', likewise, I couldn't a done it. Yo' had de key ob de boathouse, sah! W'ich yo' hab got it now, I yeckon; fo' I doane eben know w'ere it is!" whimpered 'Rusalem.

"No, indeed! My po' innocen' ole man nebber take no boat out fo' nobody! I could swear to dat!" added Wilet.

"How, then, in the devil's name, did your mistress leave the island?" angrily demanded Hanson.

"Lady an' ge'man come arter her," replied Wilet, sulkily, at bay.

Hanson stared, put up his hands to his burning and beating head, and tried to think. Then he exclaimed:

"'Lady and gentleman!' How in thunder could a lady and gentleman come here?"

"Dey didn' come in thunder; dey come in Pete Simmons' yow boat, sah!" answered Wilet, who gained courage as she lost temper—a not infrequent effect of anger.

"What a literal idiot you are!" said Hanson, impatiently. "In a boat?' From Snowden?" he inquired.

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"'Course, sah! dere ain't no oder place dey could come f'om in a yow boat."

"Who were these intruders?"

"Wot dat yo' say, young marse?"

"These people! Who were they?"

"Dunno, young marse. Dey wasn't interdooced to me."

"Clear out!" angrily exclaimed Hanson. And then: "Come here, Sambo! Your wife is a driveling idiot! Tell me about this business."

"P'ease, p'ease, young marster, I dunno nuffin' t'all 'bout it! 'Deed, Lor'mity knows I don't! Wilet, dere! she know! Arks her, young marse," pleaded 'Rusalem, creeping toward the bedside obediently, and then shrinking away fearfully.

"I'll tell yo', young ge'man, all about it—dat is all as I knows about it, if yo'll 'have yo'se'f," said Wilet, who was not to be left in the background.

"Go on, then."

"Mus' I gin at de 'ginnin'?"

"Yes."

"Well, den, young marse, it were las' night, maybe 'bout two o'clock in de mornin', w'en me an' my ole man was 'wake up out'n our innocen' sleep by a knockin' at de do'——"

"At the hall door?"

"Lor', no, sah! We couldn' a heared de hall do'! It were our own do'. An' it were de young madam knockin' an' calling to we-dem to get up an' folly her, which, in course, we did. She purveyed we all de way up de stairs to her own yoom—dis yere yoom, an'—— Now, I hopes yo' won' be offended, young marse, 'long o' wot I'm a gwine to say," said Wilet, deprecatingly.

"To the devil with you; go on, and don't stop to ask questions! Sambo! Bring me a wet towel for my head," exclaimed the tortured wretch.

"Ya—ya—ya—yas, sah!" chattered 'Rusalem, hastening to perform the required service.

"Now, go on with what you were about to say,"

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Hanson commanded, as he pressed the cold cloth to his burning brow.

"Well, sah, w'en me an' my ole man comed in dis yoom, yere we foun' yo' on de flo'—in some, some—sort—ob a—fainty fit, sah; dat were all—a fainty fit. An' we did take yo' out an' lay yo' on de matt'ress in tudder yoom. An' yo' sleeped dere all night—w'ich I mean all de res' ob de night, like a angel, young marse; yes, yo' did, sah, jes' like a angel, yo' did, an' my ole man sot by yo', an' watched ober yo' like yo'd been his own mammy—w'ich I mean like he a been yo' mammy—yes, he did, sah! Dat he did, did he! Like yo' own mammy."

Hanson stared at her.

"And—your mistress? Where did she spend the night?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Settin' in dis yere easy-chair, in dis yere yoom, sah! wid me settin' 'long o' her an' watchin' ober her an' takin' care ob her."

"Then it was all a dream! A drunken dream! Curse that brandy! I ought never to touch the stuff! My brain and nerves are of too fine fiber to endure the stimulation that coarser and heavier natures can enjoy with impunity. All a dream! All a dream!" he muttered, in low and bitter tones.

"Well, young marse, I begun to tell yo' 'bout de lady an' ge'man wot come; but it was ne'sary to tell you' 'bout yo' fainty fit, too, so yo' might know how 'twas de young mis'ess was so 'fended. I do fink as she were de mos' dignant lady I ebber see in my life. I did set long ob her till it were time to see 'bout gettin' b'eakfas'. Den I went down to de kitchen. An' I were busy makin' out my yolls, w'en de young madam come in, all full ob joy, an' said comp'ny was comin' in a boat 'cross de water, an' how I mus' git de bes' b'eakfas' de hous could 'ford. I was proper 'stonished, I tell yo'! Sho' nuff, p'esently de comp'ny come—lady an' ge'man in Pete Simmons' yow boat. An' dey tuk b'eakfas'. An' 'rectly after b'eakfas' dey want 'way an' took de young madam long ob dem, bag an' baggage. I couldn't 'vent it."

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"You say you put me to bed in another room. How came I in this one?"

"Yo' mus' a walked into it in yo' sleep, sah, w'ile my ole man was downstairs gettin' wood, caze w'en we come up we foun' yo' yere."

"What time was that?"

"'Bout dark, an' yo' was fast asleep."

"How long was that after your mistress left?"

"Hours, sah."

"Then it was a dream—only a dream," he sighed.

"Where did they go?" he next inquired.

"De young madam an' her friends?"

"Yes."

"Course dey went to Snowden. Couldn' go nowwharze else in a yow boat. Not f'om yere dey couldn'."

"And you say you don't know who those strangers were?"

"No mo'n de dead, I doane, sah."

"You didn't hear any name? Didn't hear your mistress call them by any name?"

"Now stop—less see—seems to me I did hear a name. It was—Green—or Brown—or some sich a colored name. It might a been White. No, it was Green. I'm sho' it was Green, young marse," replied Wilet, confidently, innocent of having misled the questioner.

"'Green!' Ah! some of those impertinent Snowden people taking the liberty to call upon my wife! And she taking advantage of my illness to go off with them! But I will show her and them that I am not to be trifled with, Sambo!"

"Ya—yas, sah, ef yo' means me, dough my name ain't Sambo, w'ich it is 'Rusalem, arter de holy city. Yas, sah!"

"Hold your beastly tongue and listen to me! Go and get out the boat. You will find the key of the boathouse in my pantaloons pocket. Hurry! You shall row me over to Snowden to-night to bring back my wife."

'Rusalem never moved, but stared. His jaw fell, his eyes started.

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"Do you hear me?" cried Hanson.

"Ya—ya—yas, young marse. Yo' can't launch a boat into dis yere sturm. It would be upsot an' blowed 'way fo' yo' took yo' han's offen it," chattered the negro.

"You lie!" cried Hanson.

"No, he don't, sah!" said Wilet, coming to her old man's assistance. "Listen at dat win', sah! Ef dis ole stone house wasn' built to stan' jes sich, it would be blown 'way. W'en I luk out'n de window, jes' arter de sun went down, I seed de sea rearin', an' dashin', an' foamin' 'round de cress jes' like my wash boiler a-boilin' ober. Couldn' eben get de boat to float one minute, much less go across de bay wid it."

"You lie!" said Hanson again.

"Dat ain't werry polite, young marse, to sinivate to a colored lady dat she doane speak de trufe," said Wilet, with an injured air.

But Hanson made no comment. He got out of bed, went to one of the windows, raised the sash, and threw open the shutters to see for himself.

And he instantly wished that he had not done so. The wind took the shutters and dashed them back in his face.

Slap! Bang! And the room was in a gale; chairs blown down, tables overset, window and bed curtains flying like flags.

He hastily let down the sash and hurried shuddering to bed.

"Yo' 'vinced now, young marse?" inquired Wilet.

"Go to the devil!" politely replied Hanson.

He was not in the habit of using bad language, any more than he was in the habit of getting drunk; but his nerves were shattered, his heart and head aching, and he was suffering in body, mind and temper.

Wilet gave a sign to 'Rusalem, and they both arose with the intention of stealing quietly out of the room. But Hanson heard them.

"Where are you going?" he demanded, querulously.

"Well, ef we-dem can't do no mo' fo' you', young

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marse, we fought as how we would go to bed. It's gettin' sort o' late; an' we-dem didn' get much res' las' night long ob de 'fusion dat was in de house, an' we sort ob feels de want ob it now, 'caze we ain't as young as we used to be, an' so, ef we can't do no mo' fo' yo', we'll go," said Wilet.

"Stay where you are, both of you, and give me another wet towel for my head," Hanson commanded.

And they obeyed.

The man seemed to have a horror of being left alone in the great old manor house with the winds and waves raving and roaring around it.

The negroes settled themselves in two easy-chairs before the fire. Hanson closed his eyes and lay quiet for a little while; but soon he became restless, irritable and very troublesome.

"I bet I put him to sleep p'esently," muttered Wilet to herself.

Then she went to his bedside and whispered:

"Young marse, s'pose yo' let me make yo' a yight strong cup o' tea, an' yo' take it 'dout cream or sugar. Sho to do yo' head good."

"Do it, then," he said.

She went out and made the strong cup of tea—bitter strong, to conceal the taste of the drug she meant to put in it. Then she filled a china cup and dropped into it sixty drops of laudanum.

"Now I yeckon we'll get some yest," she said to herself, as she took the sleeping draught to the bedside of the "young marster."

He was thirsty, and he drank it all.

"Thank you," he said, speaking civilly for the first time to the woman, who, for aught she knew or he knew to the contrary, had given him his death potion. But he had already begun to feel the soothing effects of the narcotic.

"Sambo," he said, as he sank to rest, "see that the boat is launched as soon as possible to-morrow morning, and let me know when it is done. I must cross over to Snowden early in the morning."

"All yight, young marse," answered the negro,

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and then to himself he muttered: "But all de same, dis yere sea won' go down for forty-eight hours yet, an' dere can't be no launchin' o' no boats for two days yit, anyways."

Hanson was soon fast asleep.

"Now, ole man," said Wilet, "you an' me'll go downstairs an' go to bed. He won't know no better. He'll sleep like a angel fo' ten or twel' hours at least. Come 'long.'

'Rusalem, "nothing loath," slowly arose and stretched himself, and they both left the room together and went to their own roost, where they soon forgot all their troubles in the sleep of the just.

The three inmates of Guyon Manor Hall slept profoundly, unconscious of the storm's wreck and ruin that terrible night.

Hanson slept under the influence of the narcotic; 'Rusalem and Wilet under pressure of age and weariness, while winds and waves raved and roared and destroyed around them.

Wilet was the first to wake, and her movements about the room woke her old man.

He also rose and put on his clothes.

They went downstairs to begin their day's work.

When they opened the front doors and windows—oh! what a scene of wild destruction, of devastation, met their eyes! The wind had fallen, indeed, and the sky was clear, the sun was shining, but the sea was still raging, foaming and boiling around the Crest, as if it would rise and engulf it. The ground was strewn with the wrecks of buildings and trees, all the wooden fences and outbuildings were down, and the roofs and doors were torn from the stone buildings. Nothing had escaped ruin but the manor house, which had stood the siege of winds and waves like some impregnable castle of old times. And the fishers' huts were gone—not a vestige of boathouse or boat to be seen anywhere!

"Good Lord! wot will the young marse do now? He can't get 'way in no boat!" exclaimed 'Rusalem.

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He was arrested in further speech by the ringing of a bell.

"Dere he is now yinging fo' yo'," said Wilet.

"Yo' go answer it, ole 'oman," suggested 'Rusalem.

"Den yo' come 'long wid me, 'Rusalem. He'll want to know 'bout de boat, an' yo can splain better'n me," said Wilet.

And together they went upstairs and entered the room where Hanson was sitting up in bed.

"Well," he demanded, "have you got the boat out?"

"No, sah. De storm done carry off boat an' boat-house, an' eberyfing, sah! clean out'n sight, sah. An' de out-houses, an' de fishers' houses. Dere ain't nuffin left yere, sah, but de big house itself," said 'Rusalem.

"The devil!" exclaimed Hanson.

"Yas, young marse, dat's so, sah," assented 'Rusalem, trying to curry favor with the irritable man by agreeing to everything he suggested.

But he was mistaken on this occasion, for Hanson burst out angrily:

"How dare you answer me, you black ape, after letting the boat and boathouse be carried away?"

"Lor' a messy, young marse," exclaimed Wilet, coming to her frightened old man's defense, "po', ole 'Rusalem ain't de Loramity to 'mand de win's and waves to be still! But all de same he would a-saved de boat ef yo' had leave him keep de keys, as de ge'man Guyons did. He couldn't save de boathouse, sah! but ef he had had de keys, he could a-got out de boat, an' dragged it up top o' de hill, out'n harm's way, w'en he see de storm comin' up, like he always did."

"Hold your tongue, and go bring me some coffee."

"Yas, marse," said Wilet, well pleased to leave the man.

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CHAPTER XX

GOBLIN HALL

THE sun was just rising behind the eastern range of hills, when the train containing Roma and her friends ran into Goeberlin.

Mr. Gray had telegraphed from Snowden to Mr. Toomie at Goblin Hall, to send a carriage to meet them.

And so the first object that met their gaze when they came out upon the platform, was the huge, old family carryall, with Pompous on the box behind a pair of strong draught horses.

"All well at home, Pompous, my man?" inquired Mr. Gray.

"All berry well, indeed, sah! It's a fac' fo' de sollum trufe, praise de Lord," replied the darky, as he got down from his seat to open the door.

Mr. Gray put the two ladies inside and followed them.

Pompous shut the door and remounted to his seat.

The horses started on a fast trot. A farm negro, with a cart, took charge of Roma's trunk and brought up the rear.

An hour's pleasant drive through the early morning air brought them to Goblin Hall.

Mr. Toomie and the four young people were on the front stoop waiting for them, and greeted them with joyful welcomes.

They wondered why Mr. Harcourt was not of the party, but some fine instinct warned them to make no inquiries. On entering the house our travelers found the front hall encumbered with thirteen trunks; some of them of the largest size; all of them locked, strapped and labeled.

"Why, how industrious you have been, young folks, to have got all this work done!" Mrs. Gray exclaimed.

"Haven't we!" cried Abbot, in proud delight. "And I tell you it was no child's play to get everything that

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all of us wanted to take away into thirteen trunks. Your biggest Saratoga was the worst, mamma. Pompous had to sit on top of it before we could get the lid to close."

"Tim Toomie wrote all the labels, and I pasted them on. Tim writes a splendid hand. And see how particular he has written them," added Rudolph, reading off the inscriptions:

"'Mr. Joel Gray, Steamer *Sea Queen*, Pier ——, East River, New York.' Now they can be sent right off to the express office at Goeberlin this very day."

"I am very much obliged to Mr. Toomie," said Mrs. Gray.

The young parson, who was present, blushed and bowed.

"But all the same I told Tim that Papa Joe said no man who wrote a splendid hand ever succeeded in doing anything else very well," put in Abbot.

"My dear! 'Tim' and 'Joe!' You should be more respectful to your teacher and to your papa than to call them by their given names, and even shorten those names," Mrs. Gray said, with an admonishing shake of her head.

"Oh, well! if we are going to be high and mighty because we are United States consuls, I suppose it is all right. And if Tim and Papa Joe want me to reverence them at a distance, why of course, I must do it; but I would rather love 'em close, and free, and easy. What do you say, Mr. Gray?"

"Nonsense, my boy! Call me what you like. We have been boon companions too long to begin to stand on ceremony now," laughed the consul.

"So we have. Now look here, mamma. When Papa Joe, Ru and I formed the club of 'Jolly Dogs,' and Papa Joe was president, and I was treasurer, and Ru was secretary, we were all officers. There were no privates in our club. But we were not ceremonious on that account. It used to be Joe, and Ru, and Ab among us. And you can't teach old dogs new tricks, especially old jolly dogs. Can we, Ru?"

"No, we can't," assented Rudolph.

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"Well, well, now let us go get off our wraps and get ready for breakfast," said Mrs. Gray, leading the way upstairs.

That day was a busy and crowded one. Directly after breakfast the work was begun.

Two farm wagons, drawn by mules, were loaded with the thirteen trunks and dispatched to Goeberlin, to be sent by express to the Liverpool steamer, New York City.

Cases and hampers of preserves, pickles and wines, that would no longer be needed by the family, were sent, with Roma's compliments, to Rev. Mr. Shaw and Dr. Keech, and enough of the same luxuries were left for an occasional treat on high days and holidays for the servants who were to remain in charge of the premises.

At sunset on that Saturday night all arrangements for the journey had been completed, and when tea was over, Mr. Toomie went away to stay over Sunday with his family, with the understanding that he was to meet the travelers at the Goeberlin Station early the next morning.

Our party gathered around the open wood fire in the parlor fireplace.

It was the first opportunity they had had since their return home for a confidential consultation.

Mr. Gray renewed and pressed a proposal that he had already, on several occasions during the last three days, made to Roma.

"My dear," he said, "it is not too late. Your trunk has not yet been unpacked. Make up your mind to go with us to Europe.'

"Do, oh, do, Roma, my love," pleaded Ruth.

"Oh, please, plèase do, Roma," begged Abbot.

"Oh, do, like a darling cousin, prayed Rudolph.

"Oh, yes, dear Roma," entreated Mabel Gray.

"You would make us all so happy. Please do come, Roma," implored Minnie.

"And, my dear," recommenced Mr. Gray, "think, with all your wealth and beauty, of your friendless and embarrassing position, left alone here."

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"Not friendless, uncle. There is dear old Mr. Shaw, who married my parents and christened me. And there is good Dr. Keech, quite as old and as dear a friend."

"Yes; but they are both aged and infirm, Roma."

"And there is my faithful trustee and lawyer, Amos Merritt."

"Umph! Yes! a professional acquaintance. You had best make up your mind, even at the last moment, to go with us, Roma," repeated Mr. Gray. And the chorus opened again.

Not until it had sunk into silence could Roma get a hearing.

"It is impossible for me to go with you, uncle," she said. "Think what a work I have to do here. I have to expose the foulest fraud that ever was attempted or perpetrated on man or woman, and to punish it if there be any law by which such a crime can be punished, which I doubt, for I think that no law-maker ever dreamed of the possibility of such an infamous deed to make any provision for its prevention or punishment. And I have to find——" Her voice broke down for a moment, and she was ready to burst into a paroxysm of sobs and tears; but her strong, self-governing nature conquered, and she continued —"I have to find Will Harcourt if he be alive, to discover the manner of his death, if he be dead, and to bring his destroyer to justice. I have also, if it be practicable, to look after and comfort the poor Niobe of Lone Lodge Manor. This is my work; and if it were not for the necessity of work I could not bear up under the burden."

"I think you could, my dear. I never saw so strong a woman. But, Roma, since you will not, or cannot go with us, I really feel disposed now, at the last moment, to give up our voyage, throw up my appointment and stay here to help you," said Joel Gray.

"Indeed, you must not and shall not do anything of the sort. You would fail in your duty to your country if you were to resign now. Besides, I am

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quite competent to take care of myself, as I have shown, and to push this matter through."

Joel Gray sighed.

"Heaven knows," he said, "if it were only my personal interests that were concerned I would throw up the consulship at once and stay here to look after you, my dear. But, as you justly remarked, I owe a duty to the country, or, rather, to the administration. But, Roma, I will do all I can for you, my dear. We shall have a few hours in Washington on Monday before we go on to New York. I shall have to see the secretary once more; but I shall try to find time —indeed, I must find time to investigate this fraudulent marriage, or attempt at a fraudulent marriage, and put matters in train for you. You have those documents with you?"

"Yes."

"Let me see. What were they?"

"Three forgeries by the felon, William Hanson, whom I hope to send to the State prison for twenty years, even if there is no law to punish the attempt at a darker deed of deception."

" 'Three forgeries?' " repeated Joel Gray, interrogatively.

"Yes; the marriage license, the marriage certificate, and the letter of renunciation, purporting to have been written by Harcourt—all forgeries of William Hanson's."

"They may not be forgeries, my dear. But whether they are, or are not so, can only be determined by an examination of the records in the register's office at the City Hall, and at the church where the marriage ceremony took place. It may have been as Hanson boasted—that he himself really, though fraudulently, married you. We can only ascertain the truth by reference to the records in Washington City."

"I believe them all to be forgeries, uncle."

"We shall see when we go to Washington, my dear."

"And now," put in Mrs. Gray, "as we are all tired, let us go to bed."

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Her proposal was readily accepted by the weary party, and they separated to retire to rest.

"'We shall see when we go to Washington.' What shall we discover there?" was the last thought of Roma's as she fell into a troubled sleep.

CHAPTER XXI

SURPRISES

"It's snowing," cried Abbot Gray, in a rapture of delight, as he stood in his nightshirt, at the window of his bedroom, gazing out upon a world of thickly falling white flakes, that hid everything else from view, on the Sunday morning of the last day they were to spend at Goblin Hall.

At the word Rudy jumped out of bed and joined his brother at the window.

"Oh, how jolly!" he cried.

"We'll have to go to church in the sleigh," said Abbot.

"If we can go at all," said Rudolph.

"Oh, we'll go, Rudy. Joe'll manage it."

"Joe can manage anything. Ain't you just awful glad he's our papa?"

"Yes, glad every day of my life, you bet."

"There! There's the breakfast bell! Now we have got to hurry!" exclaimed Rudy.

With these words the boys hurriedly left the attractive window, and washed and dressed in haste, and ran downstairs and into the breakfast room, where all the family were already gathered.

"Good-morning to everybody. Oh, isn't it jolly!" exclaimed both the boys in a breath.

"Very jolly for you, no doubt. But suppose this should prove to be a deep snow, and be drifted upon the railway track and delay our journey, how should we get to New York in time to secure our passage in the *Sea Queen?*" demanded their mother.

The faces of both boys fell.

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"Never fear. We never have deep snows in these latitudes so early as the middle of November," said Mr. Gray, reassuringly.

"And are we to go to church to-day?" inquired Abbot.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Gray.

"And in the sleigh?" questioned Rudolph.

"No, the snow is not deep enough for that; besides, it is still falling thickly. Rudy, your papa and myself will go in the close carriage, the girls and you in the covered wagon. And as both conveyances will be at the door in half an hour, we had better sit down and get our breakfasts," added Mrs. Gray.

They gathered around the table, and, with appetites stimulated by the pure, cold weather, they enjoyed the coffee, buckwheat cakes and home-made sausages, with other savory dishes, that loaded the board.

After leaving the table, Roma drew Mrs. Gray aside, and said:

"Auntie, I wish to ask you a question. My marriage, you know, was too suddenly resolved upon to have become a subject of gossip in this neighborhood; so far from the scene of it, also. But can you tell me if it has become known here?"

Mrs. Gray hesitated.

"Because you see, auntie, if the fact of my having been married in Washington City on Tuesday last is known to our neighbors here, they will be astonished to see me here so soon under any circumstances, and much more astonished to see me without my husband. Besides, how would they call me? Auntie, I had better stay home."

"My dear, I assure you that there has been no opportunity for the news to get out. Remember that the carrier pigeon brought your note only a few hours after our arrival at the Hall, and we set out immediately for the Isle of Storms. Since our return you know that we have seen no one."

"Mr. Toomie may have carried the news to his family."

"No, I warned him not to do so. Besides, he knows

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nothing of the fraud that was attempted against you. He is still under the same impression that we all were, until we met you—namely, that Will Harcourt went mad and became dangerous, and you sent for us to protect you against him. He is evidently wondering what we have done with the supposed lunatic; but he is too discreet to ask questions, and too faithful to gossip about his employer's family, especially where he has been warned, and has promised not to do so."

"You think I might go to church, then, without being placed in an embarrassing position?"

"Of course, I do. All your old neighbors call you Roma. That will be the only name you will have to answer to."

"Then I am very glad to go. I dislike to miss church under any circumstances. And now I seem to need it."

They hurried upstairs and put on their warm winter wraps, and came down again in good time to meet Mr. Gray and the girls and boys, all ready for their drive to St. Stephen's Church.

The three grown folks got into the close carriage, and the four young ones crowded, crowing with delight, into the covered farm wagon, and the procession started through the thickly falling snow, which came straight down from the zenith without a breath of wind to turn it in any direction.

So they traveled three miles over the snow-covered road, between forests of bare trees and through a moving fog of sifting snow flakes, and in good time reached the church on the outskirts of the village. There were but few carriages in the churchyard, which was an indication that there were but few people in the church, for the parish was a wide one and carriages were needed to bring the distant members to the services.

Our party entered their large, square pew before the minister came in from the vestry.

Roma bowed her head for the initiatory private prayer, and then raised it and glanced rather uneasily around to see if any of their intimate friends were

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present, or, if she could perceive from the expression of their faces, whether they had heard of the strange misfortunes that had happened to herself within the last few days.

But there was no sign that they knew anything more than the plain fact which they saw before their eyes—that "the family" had returned from their extended summer and autumn travel to Goblin Hall, and had dutifully come to church. Some one or two of the "unco' righteous," who were too strict to recognize a friend in church, even before the service commenced, met her look with serene placidity; others, less severely sanctimonious, smiled on her; others, really the best Christians, who loved their Lord and their neighbor, and therefore did not fear to give offense by any act of kindness, both smiled and nodded their welcome.

And just here and now let us say that there are too many Christians who fear God, but neither love Him nor their neighbors.

The service and the sermon were both long, and the snow deepened on the ground during their course.

After the benediction Dr. Shaw, the rector, went into the vestry to take off his gown.

Our party left their pew, but remained near the chancel to wait for the rector, to bid him good-by.

The rest of the congregation went out into the vestibule, where they waited to welcome their newly returned neighbors, but in blissful ignorance that they were also to bid them good-by for many months, perhaps for many years.

Presently Dr. Shaw came out of the vestry.

A very venerable man was the aged rector of St. Stephen's, tall and spare, with a white, thin face, white, thin hair, and a chin as cleanly shaven as a monk's. Yet, with all this, his bearing was erect, his step elastic, and his voice springy. His first words relieved Roma of all fear that he knew anything about her humiliating misfortunes—which, however, she fully intended to confide to him at some "more convenient season."

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"My dear Roma," he said, "how glad I was to see you in your place to-day! How do you do, Mrs. Elde! It is a great pleasure to welcome you home again. How are you, Mr. Gray? And these young people? All healthy and blooming! My dear May, I shall want you to take a Sunday-school class this winter. Master Abbot, how do the carrier doves thrive? Made any new additions to your fernery, from gatherings on your travels, Rudy?"

And so on, shaking hands all around.

Not until the end of the hearty hand-shaking did Mr. Gray get an opportunity of taking the hand of his wife and presenting her to the minister, with the words:

"Congratulate me, Dr. Shaw. This lady has made me the most contented old fellow on earth. We were married in Washington on Tuesday afternoon last."

"In—deed!" brightly exclaimed the rector. "Then I do congratulate you with all my heart and soul!—congratulate you both!" And he took a hand of each and shook it cordially, and then still kept the hands warmly clasped in his own.

"And the only drawback to our perfect content was the fact that you, dear friend, were not on the spot to pronounce the benediction," said Ruth.

"I will pronounce it now!" cordially responded the aged minister, dropping their hands and lifting his own.

The newly married pair bowed their heads, and the minister offered up a short, fervent prayer for their happiness, and invoked a blessing on their united lives.

"I wish to tell you how it was that we were married so suddenly in Washington," said Mr. Gray, when they looked up again.

And in a few words, for there was no time for a long explanation, he told of his sudden appointment to the consulship of Delfcome, the necessity for his almost immediate departure, the probability of his long absence, and, therefore, the expediency of his imme-

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diate marriage to Ruth Elde, to whom he had been engaged for more than two years.

"I am as delighted as if you were my own children!" said the beaming rector. "This is a union of families that I have been hoping to see for many years. Look at these young ones, how happy they are! I congratulate them, too, most cordially."

"And mind you, sir," exclaimed Rudy, who was the quickest of the two boys, "there is to be no mistake when we marry, you are to marry us if we have to come across the ocean to have you do it."

The good rector stared and smiled. He perhaps thought the arrangement a "little too previous," but he did not say so. He never liked to snub children.

"Oh, you don't understand!" said Rudy; "but, of course, now that Joe and Ruth are married, we boys and girls are going to be just as soon as we are grown up—that is, just as soon as Ab and I are grown up. Mabie and Minnie are almost grown now. They are ever so much older than we boys are. But we won't mind that so much if they don't. We shall be taller than they are, anyhow. And you know it's all in tallness, after all. And it will be the right thing to do, anyway. Don't you think so yourself, sir? Say!"

"Well," replied the smiling but puzzled minister, "that will depend upon what the young ladies think about it."

"Oh, Mabie and Minnie? Why, they said yes, years and years and years ago. We've been engaged ever since I can remember."

"Well, then, it will depend on what your parents think about it."

"Who? Oh, you mean Joe and Ruth? Not much. They never asked our leave to get married. Although they would have got it fast enough if they had! They'd have been married many years ago if we had had our way," concluded Rudy, shaking his head at the refractory couple.

"Or, if I had had mine. I agree with you there, my boy," said the rector.

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"I could not marry until Roma was off my hands," frankly explained the newly made wife.

"And now, my dears all, we must take leave of our good friend," said Mr. Gray, who evidently thought the interview too prolonged.

"And you are going away to-morrow? I am very sorry to hear you say so. I was glad ten minutes ago. Now I am sorry. Both states of mind on your account. 'Such is life,' light and shadow, both side by side—the last the result of the first. Good-by! God forever bless you. But when, if ever, shall we see you again?" inquired the rector, holding, with lingering tenderness, a hand each of Mr. and Mrs. Gray.

"In a year from this time, 'Ruth and Joe' will certainly come back, Providence permitting, to see their friends. But in the meantime, dear friend, can you not get a substitute to fill your pulpit for a few months next summer, and come over to Scotland to stay with us?" affectionately inquired Joel Gray.

"I never heard of such a thing before. I never even thought of such a thing before; but I will think of it now. But you see I never had any friends over on the other side to go to. And I never even dreamed of going among strangers."

"Come to us, then; we are your own people," said Ruth.

"I will! Please God, I will! Good-by! Good-by, dear children! God's blessing be with you always, as it will without my asking."

And with more hand pressing, more adieus, and more benedictions, the friends parted.

The rector, a widower for the past five years, and without children in this life, left the church by the vestry door, to return to his lonely but not unhappy home, where he led a peaceful life among his favorite books, his devoted servants, his pet animals, and his flowers.

Our party left the aisle, and entered the vestibule where their old neighbors had been waiting for them for twenty minutes, and beguiling the time by gossip.

Our party were instantly surrounded.

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"So glad to see you all back again!" said half a dozen, in a breath.

"When did you get home?" asked half a dozen more.

"You are looking remarkably well, Mrs. Elde!" exclaimed the family physician, Dr. Keech—solo.

"I am very well, thank you. Almost sorry I am not sick, so I could have an excuse for calling you in," gayly responded Ruth.

"Allow me!" exclaimed Mr. Gray, taking his wife's hand. "This lady has honored me supremely. We were married in Washington last Tuesday."

"You—don't—say so! Well, now, that was too diabolically shabby of you, Gray, when you knew perfectly well that I was only waiting for you to get yourself hanged before making up to the lovely widow myself," said the doctor, solemnly.

"When you knew she would have seen you promoted in the same way before she would have taken you," retorted Joe. "But—bear it like a man, and whatever you do—don't sulk."

"'Sulk,' indeed! Sulking wouldn't begin to meet the case. We sulk with a friend who neglects to answer a letter promptly, or with a neighbor who forgets to call. But sulk here! No! this is a case for—magnanimity or—murder! It shall be magnanimity on my part. So I will not only congratulate you and my lost and lovely one, but I will wish you both all the happiness and prosperity that you deserve—and much more, else it would be very little. And I will take the embarrassment off your hands and introduce Mrs. Joel Gray—'on her marriage,' as they say at court—to her astonished neighbors."

Everybody knew the old bachelor doctor and his rough manner of joking too well to be surprised or displeased.

The neighbors were not at all "astonished" when they heard of the sudden marriage. It was what they had been expecting for two years past, and what they highly approved, now that it had taken place.

Hearty good wishes were offered by all; and when

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they heard that the united families were going abroad, to remain for years, sincere regrets for their loss and earnest hopes for their prosperity were expressed.

At length the last leaves were taken, and our party entered the carriage, or farm wagon, and turned the horses' heads homeward.

It was still snowing, and faster and thicker than ever.

"Oh, Lordy! if the railroad should be blocked up!" exclaimed Abbot, from the front of the farm wagon.

"No fear, my boy," called Mr. Gray from the back window of the close carriage. "The faster it snows the sooner it stops."

"Joe's a brick, isn't he? He always encourages you," said Rudy.

"Joe does everything good. And I do believe he could do anything. I believe he could get it to stop snowing if he put his mind on it," replied Abbot.

"Hush, Ab!" said Mabie Gray. "That is profane. You know very well that nobody can make it stop snowing but the L-o-r-d." She uttered the name in a very low tone and with reverential deliberation.

"Of course, I know that. And I didn't mean to be profane, May. I meant about the prayer of a righteous man availing much, you know," replied Abbot. And probably at that moment, when he first remembered the text in question, he might have thought that he had meant it.

"Oh, if you meant that, Ab, I have nothing to say against it, for certainly papa is a righteous man, if ever there was one in this world," said Mabel.

"Yes, indeed! that he is!" came in a cordial chorus from the three other young people.

Their progress homeward was slow, for, though the snow was not drifted, it was deep, and it clogged the wheels of carriage and wagon.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon before they reached Goblin Hall.

When they got out of the close carriage and covered wagon they found themselves in a pure, white world—a world of snow. The low ground was deep

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in snow; the hills were covered with snow; the bare trees were clothed with snow; the roofs of all the buildings were capped with snow; the copings of all the windows were faced with snow.

One glance around the scene of white wonder, and our party entered the house, whose door was held open by the colored housekeeper, Ceres, which negro dialect had turned into Serious. The colored people are contrary in their use and misuse of words, as the Londoners are in their placing and misplacing of the H. If the Goblin Hall housekeeper's name had been by any chance of eccentricity Serious, they would inevitably have abbreviated it to Se'rus; but as it really was Ceres, they incontinently rendered it Serious. Now, whether this name had had any influence in forming her character, I do not know; but I think it must have had, for she was certainly the most serious woman that ever existed. She took the gravest views of life, enjoyed a funeral, and looked on the dark side of a wedding, a birth, or a christening. She had never married. She had too bad an opinion of men. She believed that Adam had told "a false," as she called it, when he laid all the blame on Eve about that apple. Women were "po' creeturs" enough, but as to men, "Humph, humph!"

She even made the life of her uncle, Pontius Pilate, a most grievous burden to him, by continually warning him that an old sinner so puffed up in both body and mind as he was, would surely die soon with "appleplexy," and go straight to the lake of fire and brimstone.

Now, as she opened the door for her mistress and party, she shook her head solemnly, sighed profoundly, and said:

"I know you've all got your deafs, an' de groun' will be hard by de time yo' all die, an' de diggers will hab a orful time, an' it'll be so cole dat lots o' people will get deir deafs 'long o' goin' to de fu'nel. 'Ded yo' ought to take a 'sideration on to oder people, ef yo' don't on to yo'se'ves! 'Specially yo' ole marse, whose

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hoary head is like a white rose in de winter time, a-blossimin' for de grabe."

This monologue was pronounced at the half-frozen party, as Serious closed the door after them, opened the parlor door, and went in before them to stir up the fire.

No one replied to her. They were so accustomed to her dark jeremiads that her words "went in at one ear and out at the other," leaving no impression.

"Dinner sp'iled, too," she resumed, as she put down the poker—"soup stood so long it hab lost all its savor; an' all de res' de same. An' de cook as cross as Cuffy! Doane yo' feel no 'sponsibility for puttin' ob people in a passion? Better had!"

And she misapplied a text of Scripture concerning offenses and those through whom they come, that it would be irreverent to quote in this connection.

Then she went from one to the other of the returned family, and collected bonnets and shawls, coats and hats as they were laid off by their wearers, and took them out of the room to put them in their proper places.

As soon as she got warm, Mrs. Gray, who, from the mere force of habit and not from the wish of usurpation, continued her rôle as mistress of the house, rang and gave orders for dinner to be put on the table.

It was not spoiled, and even if it had been, they would have dined with pleasure, for the long ride through the pure, keen air had given them all very sharp appetites.

The afternoon and evening were spent in the perfect rest that was needed to prepare them for the long journey of the next day.

Abbot had brought his dovecote into the house, saying it was too cold to leave it out in the snowstorm, especially now that the wind was rising. He set it up in the hall, and then came and sat down by Roma, and said:

"Roma, I did intend to send Psyche to you, at the Isle of Storms, by the first opportunity, because she pined so for her mate that I thought she would have

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died. I would have let her loose, but she never would have known where to find him. Even a carrier pigeon don't know the way to a place it was never at. Oh, but when Cupid came with your letter! Oh, but you should have seen that! Well, but I was going to say that I will leave them both here with you, Roma. I know you will love them and take good care of them."

"Indeed I will, dear boy!" for your sake as well as for their own."

"I wish you were going, Roma! Oh, it will be so jolly! Why won't you go?"

"I have work to do here, Abbot."

"Oh, yes, I know. You have got to go to see dear Will, very often, to be sure that the doctors and the nurses do their duty by him, and make him comfortable and happy, and all that! Oh, dear, I am so sorry for Will; it almost takes all the pleasure of going to sea away from me, when I think of him!" said Abbot, who, with all the young people, had somehow got the idea that poor Harcourt was in some hospital or asylum for medical treatment. Perhaps they received the impression from their parents' unguarded talk on the night when they were summoned to the rescue by Roma.

Rudy struck in and changed the subject.

"How long will we be out of sight of land, Joe?"

"From eight to ten days, my boy! It will depend upon the weather, which is likely to be rough at this season," answered Mr. Gray.

"From eight to ten days! Oh, won't that be jolly! I wish it was eight or ten months! I wish it was eight or ten years. Don't you, Joe?"

"Not exactly, my boy."

"Rudy, if we have rough weather for only three or four days, you will be out of sight of land long enough to wish that you had never come in sight of water," said Mrs. Gray.

"Oh, Ruth, don't discourage a fellow! Joe never does!"

"Come! You boys go right off to bed now. We must all be up by five o'clock in the morning, eat

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breakfast by lamplight, and start at six to catch the eight o'clock train for Washington. Have all your traps in order, so that there will be no hunt for gloves, or caps, or anything else at the last minute—as is the usual nuisance," said Mrs. Gray.

"Joe, can't you just please make Ruth let me alone? What is the use of having a papa if he can't take a fellow's part when he is put upon by his mamma?" demanded Rudy, appealing to the higher power.

"Oh, hush, Rudolph! You are a very undutiful boy. I don't approve of you at all," said Minnie Gray, in a tone of grave rebuke. "I was going to work a text for you and have it framed to be hung up over your room door, and it was to be, 'Love One Another,' but now it shall be, 'Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother,' so that you may mind and do it."

"I do honor my father and my mother. There is nobody in the world I honor so much as my father and my mother!" exclaimed the boy, almost crying, as he darted to the sofa, where the pair merely happened to be sitting side by side, for they never posed as "Darby and Joan."

He clasped his arms around his mother, and then around his stepfather, and then around both together as far as he could, while he cried:

"I do love and honor you. I do love and honor you, Joe. I love and honor you both better than I do anybody in the whole world, but I do love to make free with you, you dear darlings! It sort of makes you so much closer to me. Do you really mind, mamma? Do you mind, papa? If you do, I'll mend my ways and call you nothing but father and mother, and sir and madam. And when I write to mamma I will begin my letter, 'Honored Madam,' and end it, 'Your most obedient, humble servant, and dutiful, affectionate son,' like George Washington, or some other big wig of the last century did. Say, now! It shall be just as you please."

"My boy," said Mr. Gray, "honor is a matter of conduct, not words."

"It's de Lord's trufe for a sollum fack, ole marse!

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Put dat in yo' pipe an' smoke it, young marse!" exclaimed Pompous Pirate, who had just come in with an armful of logs to replenish the fire.

Nobody answered his unanswerable wisdom.

"Go now, my boys, and get to bed. You will want all the sleep you can get between this and five o'clock in the morning," said Mr. Gray.

And the lads bade everybody good-night and left the room.

An hour later Mr. and Mrs. Gray, Roma, and the two girls followed them.

And the house was quiet.

CHAPTER XXII

FOLLOWING THE CLUE

THE alarm clock, which had been set for the purpose in the Grays' room, roused that worthy pair at five o'clock in the morning.

Joe started up, drew on dressing gown and slippers, left his chamber and made a tour of the upper hall, knocking at every bedroom door to rouse the sleepers.

This precaution was found to have been necessary, for all were fast asleep. Each and all had been kept awake until long after midnight by different causes—the young people, through thinking this, that and the other in connection with their coming voyage and foreign home; Roma, by anxious reflections and speculations concerning her own position and circumstances.

Each and all seemed to themselves to have but just fallen into a deep and dreamless sleep when Mr. Gray's loud rap startled them like Gabriel's trump.

"Up with you, sluggards, or you will be left behind!" he cried; and when he was sure that he had roused the very last sleeper, he lighted a candle and went downstairs and to the rear of the house to call up the servants. The kitchen fire was out, and all was dark and cold. The house-servants' rooms were, as is usual

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in many old-fashioned country houses, directly over the kitchen, and reached by a narrow staircase running up from one corner. Negroes sleep soundly—profoundly—and it is no easy matter to wake them up earlier than their usual time for rising.

Mr. Gray had to try his muscle and raise his voice, knocking and shouting, before he could call his satellites from Hades to the upper world.

Not until cook and housemaid had come down from their den, and the man-servant had come in from his roost over the woodhouse, did Joe feel safe in leaving them to themselves. Then he stopped to give orders.

"It is now ten minutes past five. Breakfast must be on the table at twenty minutes to six—do you hear, Ceres?"

"Yes, ole marse, I does hear, an' I'll see it done. It'll be a comfort to me to fink as yo' had one good, hot breakfas' fo' de las' time fo' yo' was smashed up on de yailyoad, an' I hears ob it," sighed Serious.

"Put dat in yo' pipe an' smoke it, ole marse! It's de Lor's trufe for a solum fack!" said Pompous Pirate.

"Thank you, Ceres. And now, Pontius, see that the carriage and the farm wagon are at the door at six o'clock, sharp—do you hear?"

"Yes, ole marse; I'll 'tend to it, sah—faithful, sah."

"All right, then," said Mr. Gray, as he left the kitchen and went upstairs to dress for his journey.

So prompt and active were the servants in the performance of their duties, that by the time the family came downstairs, all dressed for their drive, even to their bonnets and shawls, hats and cloaks, and with rugs, handbags and umbrellas in their hands, they found the breakfast room warmed and lighted by a good hickory fire and a brilliant chandelier, and the table set, and the breakfast ready to be brought in.

They laid down all their hand luggage and gathered around the table, while Mrs. Gray rang the bell.

A savory and substantial morning meal was set before them. Pompous Pirate waited on the table—wisdom, "in solid chunks," from time to time falling from his full lips.

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When breakfast was over, Abbot ran away to take a last tearful farewell of his beloved carrier pigeons.

"One thought comforts me, though, Roma," he said, as he rejoined his cousin.

"What is that, boy, dear?" she inquired.

"They don't suffer in this parting. They don't know anything about it; and—as long as—they have one another—they won't miss me," he concluded, with a sob.

"Come, come! Do you want to be left behind?" called the cheery voice of Mr. Gray from the threshold of the open door.

This broke the plaintive spell, and Roma and Abbot hastened to join the others, who were getting into the carriage or the wagon.

It was still dark, not the faintest sign of day was dawning in the east, but the snowstorm was over, the sky was clear, and the ground covered with hard, frozen snow gleaming strangely under the wintry starlight.

They took no lanterns with them, rightly judging that the clear starlight on the white snow was a safer guide than the fitful flame of lamp or candle could be.

The young people were delighted with the novelty and unearthliness of that early drive through the wintry woods in the dark hours before day. Even sad Roma felt the weird charm of the situation, and did not find the drive long or wish it soon ended.

When they were about halfway between the Hall and the station, the first faint light of coming day dawned in the east. And then it was a pleasure to note the gradual ascent of the light and flushing of the horizon, and then the most splendid, sublime, magnificent spectacle that the inhabitants of earth have ever seen, which may be seen every day, yet which so few ever see—the rising of the sun upon the night-darkened world. No wonder that, in ignorance of the true God, nations once worshiped, and still worship, the sun.

The sun was an hour high, and the earth and sky

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were ablaze with his light, when our party reached the station.

"There's Tim now!" joyfully exclaimed Abbot and Rudy in a breath, as they caught sight of the little tutor standing on the platform, so well wrapped up in his thick overcoat, fur cap, gray comforter and woolen gloves that one might see at a glance that the hands of a doting mother, assisted perhaps by those of a grandmother and a maiden aunt or two, had fondly fitted him out for the cold ride.

In one hand he carried a corpulent carpetbag and in the other a capacious covered basket stuffed with country luxuries enough to last the whole party through the sea voyage.

His light red hair was glistening in the morning sunshine, and his face was beaming with boyish delight.

"Hurrah! Tim, old man!" exclaimed his pupils, as they jumped off the wagon and ran to meet him.

But there was no time for talk then. Mr. Gray and the ladies greeted the tutor hastily, but cordially, as they left the carriages.

"Here on time, Mr. Toomie," said the former.

"Been waiting here more than an hour, sir," replied the little parson, smiling radiantly.

"I knew you would be. But you see the train is not here yet."

"The train is coming now, sir; I hear it."

Then another parting took place. All shook hands with Pontius Pilate, who had driven the wagon, and with his nephew, Puck, on the carriage box. And Mr. Gray gave each a liberal guerdon, which greatly gladdened their hearts.

And presently the train came shrieking and thundering up to the station, where it stopped just twenty seconds to let passengers on.

Our party, who had secured their tickets, hastened to board the cars, and the train rushed shrieking and thundering out of the station again on its easterly flight.

"I begin to feel as if I had been born on a rushing

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railway train and had always lived on one, and was always to live on one, and finally to die on a rushing railway train," said Ruth, half laughing, half grumbling, as she settled herself in her comfortable armchair in the drawing-room car.

"We certainly have spent our lives in that way for the last week, but this is better than the other journeys. It is a delightful ride on a splendid winter day, after we have been rested by a comfortable night's sleep and refreshed by a very good breakfast," said the cheery voice of Joel Gray.

As for the boys, they could conceive of nothing in this world more delightful than to spend their whole lives between railway journeys and sea voyages.

Everything connected with this journey was enchanting. The dinner order from the restaurant car, the little tables set between each pair of chairs, the novelty of the whole arrangement, gave a zest to the food that was really very good in itself. Then the afternoon snooze in their cushioned chairs; the temporary forgetfulness in sleep; the waking up to a renewed sense of the delights of traveling—all these and many other incidents of the journey were blissful in experience and even more so in memory.

The train reached Washington late that evening.

The travelers went immediately to their favorite hotel in the West End, where they engaged rooms and took supper.

They were all only just weary enough to enjoy rest and refreshment.

They retired early.

Tim Toomie sat up late enough, however, to write a long and cheering letter to his old mother, telling her of his delightful journey and his good friends.

They rose early the next morning. A splendid wintry day, with the frozen snow glistening under the rays of the unclouded sun.

At the breakfast table in their private parlor, where all the party were assembled, Mr. Gray said:

"Now, Roma, my dear, we have but little time to lose in investigating the mystery of this fraudulent

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marriage before I leave you. It is too early by four hours for me to call on the secretary for official business; so, if you please, I will take you after breakfast to the office of your late guardian and solicitor, Amos Merritt, and put the case in his hands."

"Had we not better go first to the church where the marriage ceremony was performed and examine the register?" inquired Roma.

"No, my dear; we will go at once to Merritt's. He will tell us what to do first."

Accordingly, as soon as they arose from the table, Roma and Ruth put on their bonnets and cloaks, while Mr. Gray called a carriage.

Then, leaving the young folks to enjoy themselves as they might please to do, the three drove to Mr. Merritt's chambers on Louisiana Avenue.

In answer to inquiries, the clerk in the anteroom said that his principal was in his private office.

Mr. Gray sent in cards, and the visitors were immediately admitted.

Mr. Amos Merritt—a stout, florid gray-haired, clean-shaven bachelor of sixty—was alone and seated before his desk.

He arose and came forward to meet the entering party. He spoke to Roma first, holding out his hand, and saying:

"So sorry, my dear girl, that I was out of town when your wedding came off! Accept my congratulations now, sincere, if late, my dear. How do you do, Mr. Gray? And, madam, I hope I see you well."

"We are very well, thank you, Mr. Merritt," replied the gentleman and lady, in nearly the same words.

"But there is nothing to congratulate me upon, Mr. Merritt," added Roma.

The lawyer stared and waited an explanation.

"We have come to consult you upon the very strangest case that was ever laid before you or any other lawyer," said Mr. Gray.

Mr. Merritt turned his regards from Roma to the last speaker.

"Who do you suppose married Roma Fronde?"

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"Why, young Harcourt, of course."

"So did we, who were present at the ceremony. So did I, who, in your absence, gave her away. We all thought young Harcourt married her and in our presence, but it seems he did not."

Merritt stared, but expressed no surprise. He was an old lawyer. He would die first.

"You have heard of frauds with substituted children. Did you ever hear of a substituted bridegroom?" demanded Mr. Gray.

"Ta—ta—take seats," said the lawyer, more disturbed than he would let it appear that he could be, and drawing his chair forward, as he foreboded a long story.

"Now, my dear Roma," said Mr. Gray, as soon as they were all seated, "state the facts from the beginning as briefly as you can, yet do not omit any detail of importance."

Then Roma, calling up all her self-control, told the story of her unutterable wrongs, as it is known to the readers.

"Well," Amos Merritt was forced to admit, "I have been nearly forty years in the practice of law, yet never have I heard of such a case. The law books are full of remarkable instances of crime; yet none like this."

"I do not know," said Roma, "that there is one word of truth in the statement made to me by the man Hanson, or one genuine document among the papers he showed me. On the contrary, I believe his story to be a falsehood and the documents to be forgeries, and that William Harcourt has met foul play at the hands of Hanson."

"He has that, most assuredly, even though the foul play went no further than his attempt to steal his bride," said Joel Gray.

"Have you those documents with you, my dear?" inquired Mr. Merritt.

"Yes," said Roma, drawing the papers from her pocket, separating and laying them down on the desk one by one. "Here is the marriage license—a cunning

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forgery, no doubt. Here is the marriage certificate—another cunning forgery. And here is a letter of renunciation, purporting to come from Mr. Harcourt, but really the most atrocious forgery of the three, though the least cunning, for it is not even a good imitation of Will Harcourt's handwriting, and for which this criminal should suffer the punishment meted out to the forgers in the last century. He should be hanged."

Roma spoke without passion, but with stern inflexibility.

"My dear," said the lawyer, who was critically examining the first two documents laid before him, "these appear to be genuine. I feel almost certain they are genuine. If they are forgeries, how could he possibly have obtained the printed blanks to fill in and the seals?"

Roma lifted her eyes to his face with a look of dismay.

"However, the way to test the matter will be to compare these documents with the records in the county clerk's office in the City Hall, and with the register in the church where you were married. Now let me see the letter."

Roma took it from the table and handed it to him.

"This, indeed, may be a forgery," he said, scanning it, "for it does not look like Harcourt's handwriting, though, really, if the note were written in the state of agitation the words imply, the hand might have been affected by the nerves. As I said before, the best way to test the matter will be to search the records."

"I agree with you, Mr. Merritt, in pronouncing the two documents genuine. I also think Hanson told the truth about the substitution of himself for the bridegroom in the course of the marriage ceremony. You see such substitution, even under the eyes of witnesses, was quite possible under the circumstances," Mr. Gray said, and paused.

The lawyer looked at him inquiringly, but said nothing.

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Joel Gray continued:

"You see, Hanson was best man, and undertook all the arrangements for the church ceremony. He spoke to the minister, and might easily have represented himself as the prospective bridegroom. He took out the license, and might easily have taken it out in his own name. The only difficult and dangerous part of the program was in the church. But there, no doubt by some contrivance, perhaps bribery of the sexton or of some one else, the gas was so low that we could really scarcely see each other's faces. And at the time of putting on the ring, it sank almost into darkness, so that the minister paused, until Hanson, best man—yes, I do remember it was Hanson—begged him to proceed, as the wedding party wished to catch the boat. And the ceremony was concluded almost in darkness. The fact that Harcourt and Hanson had the same Christian name also facilitated the imposture. In the vestry, also, the gas was almost extinct, and we could scarcely see to sign our own names, or read those of others."

"But such a fraud could not have been perpetrated without the connivance of Harcourt himself," said the lawyer.

"Unless Harcourt had been practised upon by some stupefying drug secretly administered by Hanson," suggested Mr. Gray. "The young man—I mean Harcourt, of course—certainly acted very strangely and stupidly. I attributed it to his imperfect recovery from brain fever, and I begged Roma not to marry him just then."

"Well, I repeat, we must examine the records, both at the City Hall and at the church, and question the minister, and the sooner we set about it the better," said Mr. Merritt.

"Tell me!" exclaimed Roma, "if it should appear that Hanson really did marry me, as he said, and in the treacherous and fraudulent manner in which he did, does that ceremony bind me in any way?"

"Not in the least, neither legally nor morally; though, of course, it would be well to have the cere-

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mony formally set aside by the court. There will be not the slightest difficulty and need not be the slightest delay in effecting that."

"And can it be done without publicity?"

"I think so. But we must see first whether there has been any such marriage as Hanson claims that there has been. For if these documents are not corroborated by the records, then they are forgeries, and there has been no such marriage."

"Are you disengaged to-day? Can you go with me at once to make these investigations?"

"Yes; I am not very busy. I will attend you with pleasure," said Mr. Merritt, and he got up and put on his hat and overcoat.

He took the one vacant seat in the carriage that stood before the door, and the four friends crossed the avenue to the City Hall, alighted and went straight to the register's office. Inquiry there showed that the marriage license had been taken out in the name of William Hanson, of New York, and Romaine Guyon Fronde, of Maryland.

The clerk also identified the document Mr. Merritt exhibited as the same license he had issued to Mr. Hanson on the previous Monday, November 14th.

"It begins to look black," said Joel Gray.

"If it were not a forgery it was a treachery with which Will Harcourt had nothing to do, and of which he knew nothing," said Roma.

They drove from the City Hall straight down South Four-and-one-half Street to the "Island," and turned west and on to the church. They drew up at the door of the parsonage.

Mr. Gray alighted and rang the bell.

The door was opened by the Rev. Mr. Truman in person.

When Mr. Gray expressed a wish to look into the parish register he politely assented, and went and got his hat and cloak and came out with a large key in his hand to show his visitors into the church.

They went directly to the vestry, and the minister

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took down a large folio from a shelf and laid it on the table.

Mr. Gray turned over the leaves and found the page recording the marriage which had been solemnized in that church on the preceding Tuesday.

There stood registered the marriage of William Hanson, of New York, to Romaine Guyon Fronde, of West Virginia, performed by the Rev. Thaddeus Truman, witnessed by Augusta Bushe, Rebecca Bushe, Joel Gray, Ruth Elde, Timothy Toomie and others.

"Blacker!" muttered Mr. Gray, as he beckoned his friends to look on the page.

"Treachery!" said Roma.

"Do you remember the marriage of last Tuesday?" inquired Mr. Gray, turning to the minister.

"Perfectly. It is too recent to be forgotten, even if there had been nothing to fix it in my memory," replied Mr. Truman.

"To what do you allude?"

"The early hour of the morning, in the darkness before dawn, for one thing; the lowered gas, for another."

"Ah!. Why was the gas lowered?"

"At the special request of the bridegroom, Mr. Hanson, who engaged me to perform the ceremony. He told me that his betrothed was suffering from congestion of the retina in both eyes, and could not tolerate light, though no one would know it from the appearance of her eyes, which showed no sign of disorder."

"Oh! But I heard that at an important crisis in that marriage ceremony the gas went almost out. How was that?"

"I inquired afterward of the sexton, but he seemed to know no more than I did. I then sent for the gas agent and had the meter examined; but there seemed nothing wrong in that," replied Mr. Truman.

The friends looked into each other's faces, and, without words, expressed—

"Unutterable thoughts."

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Mr. Gray roused himself, and taking the certificate of marriage from the hands of Roma, passed it to Mr. Truman, and inquired:

"Will you look at this—note every name in it—and tell us whether this is the certificate you issued to the couple you married on Tuesday morning?"

The parson looked over the document carefully, more as a matter of form in compliance with the request of his visitor than from any necessity of identifying it to his own perceptions.

"Certainly," he said, "this is the certificate of the marriage of William Hanson to Romaine Fronde, issued by me to the married couple immediately after the signing of the register. It is all right. Do you think there is anything wrong in it?"

"I only wished you to see if it is the one you issued," replied Mr. Gray, evasively. And then he said: "We are very much obliged to you, sir, for your courtesy in the matter; but we will not trespass further on your time. Good-morning, sir."

The minister bowed, looking a little mystified by the visit, and as if he would like to ask an explanation if he might venture to do so.

The party returned to their carriage.

"Blackest of all! Black as Tophet!" said Joel Gray, when the four were seated again in their carriage and on the way back to the hotel.

"The blacker it looks the more assured—if possible to be more than I have always been—I am now that Will Harcourt had nothing to do with this infamy. By what arts Hanson effected the deception we have partly seen and partly may surmise," said Roma.

"The entanglement is sufficiently serious to require the action of the court, Merritt, eh?" inquired Mr. Gray.

"I think so," replied the lawyer.

"And to think that minister never recognized one of us as the witnesses!" said Mrs. Gray, speaking for the first time.

"No! And that shows how imperfectly he must have seen us in the church," replied Joel Gray.

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The carriage drew up before the hotel.

"Now, my dears," said the newly appointed consul, "I must leave you and go to see the secretary. If Merritt is at leisure, Roma, perhaps he will do us the favor to go in and talk your case over with you," said Mr. Gray. And with a bow, he left the carriage and walked off across the park toward the state department.

CHAPTER XXIII

"THROUGH THE WOODS"

"How many witnesses were present at this marriage ceremony?" inquired Lawyer Merritt, when they had all laid off their hats and wraps and sat down in the parlor.

"Not many; let me see," said Roma, reflectively.

"Give me their names," said Merritt, taking notebook and pencil from his pocket.

"There were Mr. Gray, Amabel and Ermine Gray, Mrs. Ruth Elde, Abbot and Rudolph Elde, Mr. Timothy Toomie, Mrs. Bushe, Miss Rebecca Bushe, who was my bridesmaid, Mrs. Dorothy Harcourt and William Hanson, supposed by us all to be Mr. Harcourt's best man," Roma replied.

"We will not include Hanson. There were, then, ten competent witnesses who went to the church to see you married to Will Harcourt."

"Yes."

"None of them with any thought that any other man would be bridegroom?"

"No, indeed."

"Then every one of these must testify to that."

"Not every one of them, Mr. Merritt. Three of them must, if possible, be spared the knowledge of this fraud," said Roma, seriously.

"Eh!" exclaimed the surprised lawyer.

"Yes. Dorothy Harcourt is aged and infirm. The shock of learning of this baseness might be her death.

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And then, Rebecca Bushe is the stepsister, and Augusta Bushe the stepmother, of Hanson. The knowledge of his villainy would cause deep pain and humiliation to both. These three women must be spared this shame."

"But are you sure that these relatives of Hanson had no part in his fraud?"

"Sure that they had no part. Hanson was the stepson of Mr. Bushe by his first wife, and has a different inheritance, and different nature from my noble friends. I feel sure the news of his villainy would half kill them. They must be spared. And so must Dorothy Harcourt."

"Well, they can be spared, for a time at least, all knowledge of Hanson's rascality, but we must have their testimony all the same."

"How can it be obtained without exposing the treachery?"

"Easily enough. 'To the best of their knowledge and belief,' they witnessed your marriage with Harcourt, did they not?"

"Yes."

"Then they have only to make a deposition before a notary that they did so. They will not know why this should be required of them, but they will be very far from suspecting the reason. Their residence at a distance from the court where this case will be tried, will for a time favor their blissful ignorance; but only for a time, my dear; for in due course of events the truth must come out."

"I do not see why it should, in this instance. You told me that the evidence could be taken and the case disposed of in chambers, and that the newspaper men need not get hold of it," said Roma.

"Yes, I told you that. But there are complications which will render permanent secrecy almost impossible."

"It is not for my own sake, but for Mrs. Harcourt's and for the Bushes', to save them from mortification and distress," said Roma.

"I know that, my dear. Well! we will see. I will

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go or send to these ladies, and get their depositions. No doubt they will speculate widely as to the use we are to make of it, and will conclude finally that money or estate is in some manner concerned. Give me the address of Mrs. Harcourt and of the Bushes."

Roma did so, and Mr. Merritt made notes.

While they were still talking Mr. Gray entered the parlor. Seeing no one but Merritt and the two ladies present, he inquired:

"Where are our young ones?"

"They have gone for a drive out to the Soldiers' Home, under the escort of Mr. Toomie. I found a note stuck in the card rack to tell us so when I came in," replied Mrs. Gray.

"When will they be back?"

"To lunch, the note said. I suppose they went out directly after we did, and it is time for them to be here. Did you see the secretary?"

"Oh, yes; and had quite a satisfactory interview."

"Are you really obliged to leave for New York to-night, Gray?" inquired the lawyer.

"Yes, indeed. The steamer sails at noon to-morrow. Our luggage went before us two days ago from Goeberlin."

"Well, I am sorry for that. And, in that case, I shall have to ask you and all your party to go with me before a notary to make a deposition that you were, to the best of your knowledge and belief at that time, present at the marriage ceremony of William Harcourt and Roma Fronde."

"We will go after sundown," said Mr. Gray.

At that moment a joyous bustle was heard in the hall outside, and approaching the door. And the young people entered in a tumult of delight with their drive and their sightseeing.

Then Mrs. Gray rang for luncheon, which was promptly served.

After luncheon two carriages were ordered, and in them the party of nine left the hotel and drove to the office of Philip Madison, notary public.

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There they were again fortunate in finding that legal functionary disengaged.

Mr. Merritt introduced his client and her friends and explained their business.

The notary requested the party to be seated, and the formalities were commenced.

This took some time, for there were eight witnesses, and each made a separate deposition, and all agreeing to the one set of facts, that they had gone to the Church of the Heavenly Hope to be present at the marriage of William Harcourt and Roma Fronde, at which William Hanson was also present as best man, or groomsman; and that they had seen the ceremony which they believed at the time to have united William Harcourt and Roma Fronde in marriage; and that they knew William Hanson's part in the ceremony only as best man, or groomsman. They also deposed to the fact that at a critical point in the ceremony the gas sunk so low as to leave the church in semi-darkness. Such, in effect, was the purport of the depositions.

When the business was concluded the party returned to the hotel to dinner.

They dined in the private parlor.

"By what train do you go?" inquired Mr. Merritt, when the waiters had left the room.

"By the nine-thirty. And, oh, Merritt, you cannot conceive the pain I feel in leaving this dear girl here to fight her battles alone!" said Joel Gray.

"Not quite alone while I am here, my old friend. Roma shall be to me as a dear daughter. She shall not need a father's care or a lawyer's services," said Amos Merritt.

"I am sure of that. Yet, I tell you, if honor did not oblige me to go, self-interest should not weigh a feather in this matter. But honor does oblige me to go. The civil service of the country is as exacting as the military."

"Say no more, dear Uncle Joe. I do assure you that I am quite able to take care of myself, with my kind

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old guardian's legal advice and assistance," said Roma, cheerfully.

"For all that, I could wish that some of you could stay on until this matter is decided. Your depositions are well enough, but it would be still better to have the oral testimony of an eyewitness to the proceedings in the church last Tuesday morning," said Mr. Merritt.

Abbot Elde, who adored his cousin, and had made his deposition as to having been a witness to her marriage with Mr. Harcourt, without the slightest idea that that marriage had not really taken place, or why such a deposition was necessary, now spoke up.

"I'll stay behind and do anything in the world I can for Roma."

"You dear boy! And you were so eager for the sea voyage, too! But it will not be necessary, Abbot," said Roma.

"Oh, yes! but Mr. Merritt says it will be best. So I will stay behind and so will Tim Toomie. Won't you, Tim?"

The tutor's face fell. He did not eagerly accept the proposal.

"I think the boy's idea a good one. If Mr. Toomie and Master Abbot could be left behind to give their testimony it would be much better," said the lawyer, looking at Mr. Gray.

Joe, in turn, looked at his wife, and said:

"What do you think, Ruth? You know they could follow us by the first steamer that will sail after the case is over."

"Yes, I know. Well, if Mr. Toomie is willing——" began Mrs. Gray; but Abbot struck in:

"Of course, Tim is willing. Of course, Tim will be proud and happy to do whatever he can for Roma. Won't you, Tim?"

"Oh—certainly—cer—certainly," faltered the little tutor.

"You will not be detained long. This is a very simple case—a very plain piece of rascality—requiring only to be looked into, in order to be understood—

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and only to be understood in order to be disposed of," said Mr. Merritt, cheerfully.

"And, Tim, old man, we'll have the jolliest times you ever saw. The circus is coming next week, and the nigger minstrels the week after. And you know a parson can go to see both of those shows, though he may not be permitted to see one of Shakespeare's dramas, because they are plays," said Abbot, trying to put the best face on the affair, not only for Mr. Toomie's encouragement, but for his own as well, for this delay, voluntary as it was, was felt as a great disappointment by the boy.

Mr. Toomie faltered:

"Certainly—certainly," without well knowing what he was saying.

Rudy looked aghast, fearing that he might be invited to remain behind also.

"Then that is settled," said Mrs. Gray. "And now, Roma dear, I shall have to trouble you to get a small outfit of clothing for Abbot, for all his luggage has gone on with ours to the steamer. Mr. Toomie has his with him, I believe?"

"Yes," sighed the tutor.

"And I will attend to all dear Abbot's wants," said Roma.

Coffee was brought in, and after the party had partaken of it, they left the table to get ready to go to the depot.

At nine o'clock they left the hotel, in two carriages, Mr. and Mrs. Gray, Roma and Mr. Merritt in one, and Mr. Toomie and his four pupils in the other.

At the depot the final parting took place—not "with many tears," as the saying is. People do not grow sentimental over a voyage to Europe in these days of rapid transit and instantaneous communication which seems almost to have annihilated time and space. Even Mrs. Gray refrained from tears in bidding Abbot good-by—only telling him to be sure to put on his rubber shoes and overcoat whenever he should go out in wet weather.

Then, with a promise from Abbot that he would

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write by every mail, so that letters should follow them fast and furious; and from Roma that she also would write frequently; and with promises from Mr. and Mrs. Gray that they would "wire" the hour of their embarkation from New York, and "cable" their safe arrival on the other side, and write every few days afterward, the friends kissed and parted. Roma and her companions re-entered their carriage and started for the hotel, just as the train passed out of the depot on its northern flight.

The next day Amos Merritt filed the petition of Roma Fronde for annulling the marriage ceremony, fraudulently performed between said Roma Fronde and one William Hanson.

A few days after that Mr. Merritt came to his client, and said:

"Our old friend, Madison, has been appointed to take the testimony and report the case. I have just seen him, and he has fixed Monday next, ten in the morning, for the hearing. I have caused a notification to be served on Hanson. Sent a sheriff's officer down to Snowden with the document, but, of course, he will not respond to it. It is not likely that he will face the exposure of his rascality. I have also caused a subpœna to be served on the Rev. Dr. Truman. His testimony relative to Hanson's lie about the bride's congested eyes, and request that the gas might be turned very low, is highly important to our case. So you see I have put in a very good morning's work. And now, my dear Roma, I am off to New York to get the deposition of these two ladies. I have already written to Mrs. Harcourt, requesting her just to make a statement under oath, that she went to church to see the marriage of her son, William Harcourt, to Roma Fronde, and what she witnessed there, to the best of her knowledge and belief. I shall return here by Monday morning in time for the hearing. Good-by," he concluded, and was gone before Roma realized that he had come.

The intervening days passed heavily enough to Roma. She had few acquaintances among the perma-

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nent residents of Washington. And even to these few she did not care to make her presence in the city known under the circumstances.

She sat in her room and read. Mr. Toomie and Abbot went everywhere that inclination suggested, and had a good time generally.

On Sunday Roma went to church, accompanied by Tim Toomie and Abbot Elde.

Monday morning came at last, and with it Mr. Merritt by the earliest train. He had traveled all night and reached the city at about 7 A. M.

He had only time enough to rush to his boarding-house, change his dress, take a cup of coffee, pay a flying visit to his office to snatch up any letters that might have come during his absence, and hasten to see Roma for a few minutes before it would be time to go to the notary's chambers.

He found Roma and the two boys seated at their breakfast.

"Don't let me disturb you," were almost his first words.

"We have done," she said, and immediately pushed back her chair. "How did you find my friends?" she inquired.

"Quite well. A little anxious about the hopeful stepson and brother, from whom they have not heard for many days, and of whom, of course, I could give them no information. They were very much astonished at the business that brought me to New York, and wanted to know all about it; but, of course, on that matter also I could not, or, rather, would not, give them any information. They received an impression that their depositions of having witnessed your marriage were wanted in question of inheritance, and I did not disturb them in that impression. I have their depositions here all right. But, Mrs. Harcourt's, I am sorry to say, cannot be obtained."

"Why, what is the matter? Have you heard from her?" inquired Roma.

"Yes; but not directly; through a friend of hers, I

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suppose, who signs herself 'Margaret Wynthrop.' Here is the letter. It is short."

Mr. Merritt drew the paper from his pocket, opened it, and read aloud as follows:

"Lone Lodge, near Logwood, Md.,
"November 25, 186—.

"SIR: Your letter has been put in my hands by a servant of Mrs. Harcourt's to be answered. I regret very much to have to tell you that Mrs. Harcourt is not capable of complying with your wishes. She came home from Washington about ten days ago to see her old and faithful servant, Moses, who was on his deathbed, and who had something on his mind that he would confide to no one but his mistress. Whatever it might have been, he told her the day after her arrival. He died that night, and Mrs. Harcourt's reason became impaired. She is very quiet and as physically healthy as a woman of her age can possibly be. But memory and understanding are confused. We have written to her son, who, we understand, is at the Isle of Storms. We have not as yet received an answer from him. We directed the letter to Snowden, which, we are informed, is the nearest post town to the Isle of Storms, but the letter may not have reached him. If you know a better address, will you kindly write and inform him of his mother's condition, for though her physician says she is in no immediate danger either of death or of violent mania, yet I think she should be in the charge of her own family. I am very glad that your letter affords me this opportunity of communicating with some of the poor lady's friends. Hoping to hear from you, on her account, I am,

Respectfully yours,
"MARGARET WYNTHROP."

"Poor widow! poor mother! I must go to her, Mr. Merritt, just as soon as this business is through with," said Roma.

"But what can be the trouble? Is it probable that

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she has heard of her son's mysterious disappearance?" inquired the lawyer.

"Oh, no! It was something that happened before that. She received the letter summoning her to old Moses' deathbed, immediately after returning from seeing us off on the steamer that Tuesday morning. And she told my aunt Ruth that she had long seen that old Moses had something on his mind which troubled him."

"What do you suppose it to have been?" he inquired.

Roma paused, and slowly replied:

"I have not the faintest clew or conception of what it might have been."

The lawyer looked at his watch.

'It is a quarter to ten—time for us to go to the notary's office," he said, rising.

"I will put on my bonnet. Mr. Toomie and Abbot are down in the reading room, I believe. We can pick them up as we go down," said Roma.

"No; I will find them and see that they are ready. You will come down and join us at the ladies' entrance."

"Yes," said Roma. And she disappeared into her bedroom.

Mr. Merritt went downstairs and called Abbot and Toomie, and bade them get on their overcoats in a hurry.

Five minutes after they were joined by Roma, equipped for the drive. Fifteen minutes later they drew up before the building which contained Mr. Madison's office.

"We will let the carriage wait. We shall not be very long here," said Mr. Merritt, as he handed Roma out to the sidewalk and gave the necessary order to the driver.

Then he led his companion into the house, followed by the two boys, as the lawyer irreverently called the young clerical tutor and his pupil.

"Roma, my child, these young people had better wait in the outer room until they are wanted. You will not like to make your statement in their wonder-

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ing presence," Mr. Merritt whispered, as they went up the steps leading to the first floor.

"No, indeed, I should not. I thank you for your thoughtfulness, Mr. Merritt," replied the girl.

The lawyer opened a door on his right and led his companion into a large room, furnished with book-cases, writing desks, office tables, and rotary chairs, in which were two or three rusty-looking, middle-aged men busy among books and papers.

"Remain here, young people, until you are called," said Mr. Merritt.

Abbot immediately dropped into an empty rotary chair, and began wheeling himself round and round.

Mr. Toomie sat down solemnly on another chair, and peered mildly through his glasses. He was not in the least near-sighted, nor was there anything whatever the matter with his eyes; and spectacles rather hindered than helped his vision; but he fancied that they lent some dignity to his clerical character and gravity to his almost hopeless youthfulness of appearance; so he did penance and wore them.

"Dr. Truman has not come, it appears," said the lawyer, looking around; "unless he is in the private office, which I hope he is not. Abbot, when the minister, who performed the marriage ceremony we witnessed, comes in, give him my compliments, and ask him, if he please, to wait here until I come to bring him in."

"All right, sir," replied the boy.

CHAPTER XXIV

TAKING THE TESTIMONY

Mr. Merritt conducted his companion through silent double doors, covered with red cloth, into an inner room, smaller, but more handsomely furnished than the outer one, with a thick carpet on the floor,

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thick curtains on the windows, and a fine hard coal fire glowing in an open grate.

There were but two persons in the room—Mr. Madison, a little, dark man, with iron-gray hair, who sat in a comfortably cushioned arm chair at a handsome office desk, and a young man who sat at a table near. Mark Madison was a distinguished attorney-at-law, a notary public, and in this case the referee.

Mr. Merritt led forward his client and presented her.

Mr. Madison recognized her at once as having been present with the party who came in the early part of the preceding week to make certain depositions, although she did not then make any.

He rose, bowed, gave her a chair, and after asking her a few preliminary questions, turned to Mr. Merritt, and inquired:

"Has the respondent to this suit been notified?"

"Yes, sir, he has. On Monday of last week. There has been plenty of time for him to get here if he were disposed; but I think we can do without him. We are quite ready to go into this case," said Mr. Merritt.

The notary handed a New Testament to Roma.

She took the usual oath, and then began to make her statement. She was very calm and self-possessed, and answered the questions put to her promptly and clearly. We need not go over her statement. Our readers are by this time familiar with the story of her matchless wrongs. She told all. At some points—the sudden failing of the gas at the critical moment when the wedding ring was placed upon her finger in the church—the suddenly expressed resolution of William Hanson to accompany Mr. Harcourt and herself on the steamboat; the persecution of his presence during the whole voyage down the river and bay until they reached the Isle of Storms; the sudden disappearance of Will Harcourt from the house on the night of their arrival, and the startling announcement made by Hanson that Harcourt had renounced and abandoned her, and that he, Hanson, was, in fact, her lawfully wedded husband—at these points of Roma's

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statement I say that even the cold, collected referee seemed amazed even to incredulity.

While she spoke, the young man at the table, who seemed to be a stenographer, rapidly took down her words. When she had finished she pushed back her chair, and Mr. Merritt went into the outer room to bring in the witnesses. He re-entered with the Rev. Dr. Truman.

The minister bowed to the lady as he passed, and went up before the notary.

Being questioned, the reverend gentleman expressed a conscientious scruple against taking an oath, but would make an affirmation. He testified to the fact that William Hanson had engaged him to perform the marriage ceremony between himself and Roma Fronde, and had stipulated that the gas should be turned very low, as the lady was suffering from congestion of the eyes, that rendered light intolerable to her, and even dangerous to her sight.

When Dr. Truman had finished, Roma was recalled.

"Were you suffering from congestion of your eyes?" inquired the referee.

"No, sir; there was nothing whatever the matter with my eyes. I believe that the gas was lowered to prepare for its final almost extinction at the time the ring was placed on my finger. I believe that the whole thing was contrived to prevent my seeing whose hand placed it there," said Roma.

"That will do," said the notary, very mildly; but Roma understood that he meant she was there to testify to facts only, and not to beliefs, however plausible.

She returned to her seat beside her counsel.

Dr. Truman occupied another chair near them. He turned and spoke to Roma:

"I did not recognize you, madam, when you visited the church with your friends last week, and I am truly sorry to meet you here under such distressful circumstances."

Roma bowed, but did not speak.

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Mr. Merritt went out and brought in Mr. Toomie and Abbot Elde.

It will be remembered that neither of these young people knew anything about the matrimonial fraud that had been practised upon Roma. They were both mystified by the disappearance of the bridegroom, whom they privately feared was confined in some lunatic asylum; but they fully believed that Roma had married Will Harcourt, and that they had witnessed the ceremony.

Abbot Elde was the first of the two to be examined. After he had "kissed the book," and sworn upon it to tell the "truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," the referee asked:

"You were present on Tuesday, the fifteenth instant, at the Church of the Heavenly Hope, when and where you witnessed the marriage of William Hanson and Romaine Fronde?"

The boy gazed with astonishment at the questioner, and then "behaved himself" and answered it.

"Oh, yes, sir; I was there at the wedding; but it wasn't Mr. Hanson Roma married, you know. It was Will Harcourt. Mr. Hanson—why, he was only the groomsman."

Abbot said this with such a simple air of conviction that no one could doubt his good faith in giving this testimony.

"Now, tell us all that you saw in the church, and afterward, up to the time of parting with the newly married pair at the steamboat landing," said the referee.

Abbott told all he saw of the marriage, including the important items of the low gas, then of its going almost out; then of the parting at the boat, when the groomsman, Mr. William Hanson, decided, at the very last moment, to accompany the bride and groom on the boat.

"With whom did the bride walk when she left the church?" inquired the notary.

"With Mr. Harcourt, of course. Don't the bride

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always walk with the bridegroom?" Abbot asked in his turn.

"Did you know or suspect at the time that Mr. William Hanson was the man who married Miss Roma Fronde?"

In simple amazement at such a question, and without intending offense, the boy stared rudely.

The question was repeated.

The boy recovered, behaved himself, and answered, gravely and respectfully:

"No, sir, I did not know or suspect that cousin Roma married anybody but Will Harcourt. I never even heard of any one else who was talked of as going to marry her."

"Since the wedding day, have you heard any one except Mr. William Harcourt mentioned as her husband?"

"No, sir; never."

"Do you know why you are here?"

"Yes, sir; as one of the witnesses to cousin Roma's marriage," informally answered the boy.

Mr. Toomie was next called, and in every particular corroborated the testimony of the last witness, and almost rivaled him in astonishment and staring at some of the questions that were asked him.

His examination closed the testimony for the appellant. No one appeared on the part of the respondent.

As the party left the office, Mr. Merritt said:

"I think you will have no further trouble, Roma. The evidence all collected, with the documents, will be submitted to Judge Arbuckle—and it occurs to me that his name should be Unbuckle, considering that one of his official functions is to decide in petitions for divorce—and you will hear the result in a few days. You need not appear again unless unlikely complications should arise. I will act for you in all matters relating to this suit."

"I should like to know what it is all about, if it be allowable," said Abbot, "and so, I am sure, would Tim Toomie. His yellow hair has been on end all day like a flame."

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"You may know in time, Abbot, dear," replied Roma.

"Have you not the least idea of what it all means? And you a witness in the case?" demanded Mr. Merritt.

"Oh, yes, I have an idea; one is obliged to have ideas about everything if they have brains; but the question is whether the ideas are right or wrong."

"What is your idea, then, my son?"

"Why," said Abbot, dropping his voice to a low and plaintive tone, "I think that dear Will Harcourt went mad and became dangerous, and that was the reason why Roma sent the note by the carrier pigeon, saying that she was in deadly peril, and that now Roma is going to put him in a lunatic asylum, but cannot do so until she proves that she is his lawful wife and has the right to," replied Abbot.

"An ingenious theory, my lad. I will not say how true or false it may be just yet. Was this opinion shared by you, Mr. Toomie?"

"It was sir," replied the tutor. "I may say it was the opinion of all of us."

"Beg pardon, but whom do you mean by 'all of us'?" inquired Mr. Merritt.

"The two young ladies, the two young gentlemen and myself, sir."

"Tim," exclaimed Abbot, "if you call me and Rudy young gentlemen, I will never play leapfrog with you again as long as I live."

The little parson looked aghast. He had never played leapfrog, or in any other way compromised his cloth or his dignity since he had been ordained. It was cruel in Abbot to insinuate that he was in the habit of corroborating Darwin's theory of the Origin of Man by such monkeying. But he was too modest to defend himself. On the contrary, he ignored the boy's speech, and answered the lawyer.

"Yes, sir; and we had many discussions about it. The young gent—people would talk among themselves and ask my opinion——"

"As that of a potent, grave and reverend seignior,"

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suggested the lawyer, smiling at the solemn youth in spectacles.

"And I was bound to give it truthfully, sir."

"Of course," assented Mr. Merritt.

This conversation occurred while they were going through the passages and down the stairs.

In the hall below they found the Rev. Dr. Truman, who had preceded the party, waiting to bid them good-by.

"It is the most extraordinary case I ever heard of in the whole course of my life. I wish you well out of it with all my heart and soul, young lady. I shall pray for you," he said, gravely, pressing the hand of Roma.

"I thank you, sir," she murmured.

He bowed and went out to catch a passing street car.

Our party followed, entered their waiting carriage, and drove back to their hotel.

"You will come in and lunch with us, I hope, Mr. Merritt," said Roma, as they drew up at the "ladies entrance."

"I thank you, yes; especially as there are some little matters of detail I would like to discuss with you."

They went in and laid off their wraps in the private parlor.

Roma rang for lunch. It was soon served.

And the hungry set gathered around the table.

"Tell me, Mr. Merritt," said Roma, when they had satisfied their appetites, and were toying with fruit and cake, "is it necessary for Mr. Toomie and Abbot to remain here until after the decision in my case is given?"

"Not at all. The evidence is all in. They may sail in the next steamer, if they can get berths," replied the lawyer.

"There will be no difficulty in getting berths, even up to the hour of sailing, at this season of the year. The ocean tide of travel flows westward, not eastward, in autumn and winter. When does the next steamer sail?"

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Mr. Merritt got up, took a morning paper from a side table, examined the shipping news, and answered:

"The *Servia*, from New York to Glasgow, sails at noon to-morrow."

"That is their ship, then. Abbot, my dear, go down to the telegraph office, and send a dispatch to the agent and inquire if berths can be secured for two gentlemen on the *Servia*. I do not think there is the least doubt but there can be; but it is better to be quite sure before you start for New York."

"And if there are berths for us, we can go on to-night?" questioned Abbot.

"Why, of course, you will have to do so."

"Oh, won't that be jolly!" exclaimed the boy, and he flung himself out of the room, and down the stairs.

"The frank, outspoken feelings of a boy are often humiliating to his hearers," said Mr. Merritt. "Abbot openly expresses his joy at leaving us without the slightest regard to our feelings."

"It is but natural that he should be eager to join his family," suggested Roma.

"His 'family'! Nothing of the sort. It is to be 'on the ocean wave'—'on the roaring deep,' that he is anxious; but he will wish himself in Tartarus before he is off it," said the lawyer with a laugh.

Abbot came back and reported the telegram dispatched "all right"; and then he proposed that they should immediately begin to pack their bags.

"Time enough, my boy. If the answer to the telegram should be favorable, as no doubt it will be, and you have to go to New York to-night, you cannot start before nine-thirty. It is only three-thirty now. You have six hours," said Mr. Merritt.

Abbot heaved a profound sigh. Six hours! He had been willing to stay behind for Roma's dear sake; but now that he was on the eve of going to sea again, six hours was so long to wait.

An hour later the answer came—two berths in the *Servia* were secured.

The boy hurried off his tutor to their room to pack their bags.

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When they reappeared in the parlor, dinner was served. Mr. Merritt had in the meantime taken leave, with the promise to return at nine o'clock, to go with Roma and the boys to the depot, and to escort her back to the hotel.

The three sat down together at the table.

Abbot, in his excitment, could eat but little.

Once, in the midst of his joyous anticipations, he looked remorsefully toward Roma, thinking how lonely she would be when they were all gone.

"Cousin," he exclaimed, with a sudden impulse of generous self-sacrifice, "I suppose you have got to stay, anyhow, until this decision, whatever it may be, is given?"

"Oh, yes, my boy."

"But after that, would you be at liberty to go where you please?"

"I am at liberty to go where I please now. But it is expedient that I should stay here until the decision is given."

"And is it 'expedient' that you should stay here after the decision is given?"

"Oh, no, my dear."

"Only until it is given?"

"Only until then."

"Well, now, Roma, I'll tell you what I'll do. You know Ruth and Joe both begged you to go with them abroad, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, if you will go with us, we will put off our voyage again, and wait until the decision is given and you feel free to go anywhere, if you will go to Delfcome with us. Indeed we will, Roma, dear. We will wait for you joyfully, if you will only promise to go," said the boy, with earnest affection and devotion expressed in every feature of his dark-eyed, rosy face.

"You are very good to me, Abbot, darling; but I must remain in the country in the interests of Will Harcourt, you know. I cannot go to Europe while his fate is undecided," Roma replied.

"Oh!" sighed Abbot, and no more was said.

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At nine o'clock precisely, Mr. Merritt put in an appearance.

A few minutes later they entered a carriage and drove to the depot, reaching the spot in good time to catch the outgoing train.

In taking leave of her young cousin and his tutor, Roma said to the latter:

"I commend this boy to your charge, Mr. Toomie. Pray take good care of him, that no accident may happen to him through boyish heedlessness. Make him wrap up well when he goes on deck, especially while you are off the coast of Newfoundland, where the weather is arctic at this season."

"Do not fear, ma'am. I will take as much care of him as if I were his grandmother," said Tim Toomie, with secret reminiscence of the coddling bestowed upon himself by his own aged relative.

But this unlucky speech of the little tutor turned the tide of sentiment and semi-sorrow to a sense of the ludicrous that made everybody explode with sudden laughter.

"Why don't somebody think of the old lady herself and commend her to my care, and tell me to look after her shawls and her broth and her specs?" said Abbot, when the laughter ceased.

But little more could be said. The very moment of parting had come. Abbot shook hands with Mr. Merritt and hastily kissed his cousin. Young Toomie followed his example toward the lawyer; but

"Let 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would'"

when he turned toward the lady. So he merely shook hands with her also, and jumped upon the train, whither his pupil had preceded him.

The train immediately left the depot, and Merritt conducted Roma back to the carriage and drove with her to the hotel.

"How long do you think I shall have to wait for this decision?" inquired the lady, when they had once more reached the parlor.

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"Only a few days, I think," replied the lawyer.

"Well, even for those few days I must change my quarters. As I am now quite alone, I wish to leave the hotel for some more quiet and secluded lodgings. You know Washington thoroughly. Can you recommend me to the right sort of place?"

"Let me see," said the lawyer; and he mused for a while. "There is the Wesleyan Apartment House, in the northwestern part of the city, mostly frequented by people of a serious turn of mind, although not entirely exclusive of other respectable folk. There is a temperance restaurant in the basement, with the quaint name of 'Rebecca's Well.' No wines, liquors or tobacco in any form sold on the premises."

"Just the place for me! Will you inquire if I can get rooms there?"

"Yes. I happen to know the landlord, and I will see about it at once. Now, my dear, I must bid you good-night. I hate to leave you alone. I wish I was a married man, with a family and a house of my own, where I could invite you to stay, instead of being an accursed old bachelor, of no use to any one on earth—not even to his poor, old, selfish self!" growled the lawyer.

"You shall not say that of yourself, Mr. Merritt. You are a blessing to your fellow beings. Have I not heard my dear father say how often you have defended the cause of the widow and the fatherless, the poor and the oppressed, in our courts of law, without money and without price?"

"Well, my dear, what then? Only the searcher of hearts can know how much of true benevolence, how much of self-complacency went into my actions. But there, we won't go into metaphysical analysis just now. Good-night, my dear child." He pressed her hand and left the room.

Roma was left quite alone. It was ten o'clock, yet she did not wish to retire to rest. The exciting events of the day had unfitted her alike for repose, for occupation or for amusement.

She took up the morning papers which she had not

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yet looked at, selected one, and ran her eyes listlessly over their columns.

"One paragraph arrested her attention. It was this:

"YACHTING NEWS.—Mr. William Hanson's splendid yacht, the *Roma*, which has been lying at anchor off the navy yard for the last few weeks, has sailed for the Isle of Storms, where the happy owner and his bride are now spending their honeymoon. It is rumored that the yacht will bring the happy pair to Washington for the meeting of Congress and to spend the season."

Roma dropped the paper and put her hands to her head. If rest were uncertain before, it was impossible now. The world, then, believed her to be the bride of William Hanson, spending her honeymoon with her husband on the Isle of Storms. The villain had even had the diabolical audacity to call his yacht by her name. And now the yacht had sailed for the Isle of Storms.

What did it mean? Had Hanson found ways to communicate with his sailing master and summon the yacht to the Isle? Did the scoundrel mean to come to Washington, claim her as his wife, and contest the suit for release from the fraudulent marriage? And if so, how would his opposition affect her case? The law was proverbially uncertain, as well as occasionally unjust.

If Hanson should contest the suit, and if the suit should be decided against her? What then?

This, then, she resolved grimly: No power on earth or in hell should compel her to accept this doubly-dyed traitor, this fraudulent counterfeit, as her husband.

These torturing thoughts kept her mind on the rack, as she walked up and down the floor of her room like a lioness pacing her den.

The clock struck eleven, but she did not hear it.

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The hours passed; the clock struck twelve, one, two, but she did not hear it.

At length her magnificent physique asserted its supremacy over all mental activity and made her sleepy. She passed into her bedroom, undressed, offered up the prayers and thanksgivings that she had never in her life omitted before retiring to rest, and at length lay down and instantly sank into a dreamless sleep.

Eight hours of profound and healthful unconsciousness completely restored her. She awoke at ten o'clock, refreshed in body and mind, took her morning bath, dressed, went into her parlor and rang for breakfast.

The waiter who came in response to her summons handed her two telegrams—one was from Abbot Elde and announced his safe arrival, with his tutor, after a jolly good journey, in New York, from whence they were to sail at twelve, noon, sharp, for Glasgow. The other was from Mr. Gray, announcing the safe arrival of himself and party at Liverpool, after a very stormy passage, during which every one was seasick.

"Thank Heaven they are safe," Roma fervently breathed.

Her breakfast was brought in, and she sat down with a good appetite, notwithstanding peril and anxiety.

While she was still at the table, Mr. Merritt's card was brought her.

"Show the gentleman in here," she said to the waiter.

And in a few moments the lawyer entered.

She arose to meet him, and held out her hand with a smile.

"Good-morning, my dear," he said, but his voice and his face were very grave. "Sit down; I have news for you, Roma."

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CHAPTER XXV

WAITING THE DECISION

"I THINK I can anticipate your news, Mr. Merritt," said Roma. "Hanson's yacht has sailed for the Isle of Storms to fetch its master home."

"Yes, that is my news."

"Do you suppose that he is coming to contest my suit?"

"I do not. He probably left orders with the sailing master to sail for the Isle of Storms at a certain date, and the officer has obeyed."

"Ah! I remember now, that one of the alluring delights the wretch offered me was a voyage to the Mediterranean this autumn, and a cruise on its beautiful waters this winter. Yes, the yacht has gone only to take him on board, sail for New York, and then for the Mediterranean. Perhaps he will not come to Washington at all," mused Roma, half aloud.

"I do not think he will, even although he has received a notice to attend court."

"But if he should come?"

"He will not dare to come, my child! He will not dare to face the shame of such an exposure as he would meet here."

"'Exposure!'" repeated Roma. "Oh, Mr. Merritt, such exposure would hurt the innocent as much as the guilty—more perhaps, since the former are more sensitive to shame than the latter. Oh; do try to prevent this cruel affair from getting into the papers."

"I will, my dear! You may trust me!"

"And now about the Wesleyan Apartments, Mr. Merritt? Can I get rooms there?"

"Yes, my dear, I have engaged them for you—sitting-room, bedroom and bathroom—all en suite, with a pleasant lookout on a piece of common with a wood behind it. You know I told you it was on one of the newly laid-out streets in the northwestern section of the city, verging on the country."

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"Yes, a very pleasant location, I think. Any street railroad near?"

"Yes, a short walk will bring you to the northern terminus of the Fourteenth street railroad, where you can take a car at starting, and always, of course, find a seat in an empty or nearly empty one; similarly, you can always find a seat at the other terminus, corner of Fifteenth and F, on your return trip."

"I thank you for engaging these rooms for me. I will move into them to-day."

"And, my dear, had you not better engage a maid, now that you will be so much alone?"

"No, indeed, Mr. Merritt, I much prefer to wait on myself."

"But if you should be sick?"

"I sick! I never was sick in my life! I do not know the sensation of an ache or a pain, a fever or an ague!" said Roma, with a look of surprise.

"Very well, my dear. As you please. But you will permit your old guardian to escort you to your new lodgings?"

"I shall be very thankful for the escort."

"At what hour shall I come for you, Roma, my dear?"

"At your own convenience. Your time is valuable; mine is not, more the pity."

"Would two o'clock suit you?"

"Very well indeed."

"At that hour I always leave my office to go to luncheon. If the waiters should be busy, I have to wait half an hour to be served. So I am not expected back until three."

"Come and lunch with me to-day, then, Mr. Merritt. I will promise that you shall not have to wait. Luncheon shall be on the table at two precisely. Do you be punctual, and the half hour you would have to wait at a restaurant can be employed in taking me to my new quarters, so that you need not lose time in my service."

"I should never consider the time spent in your service as lost, my dear. But—thank you! I will come

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to lunch. And now, I must hurry away. Good-morning, my dear."

"Good-morning, Mr. Merritt."

The lawyer left the room, and Roma rang for the waiter to take away the breakfast service, and then passed into her bedroom to pack her trunk.

Punctually at two o'clock Mr. Merritt made his appearance in Roma's parlor, where he found the table set.

Roma rang the bell, and the lunch was brought in.

The old lawyer and the young lady spent put little time over it.

"The carriage is at the door, my dear, so if you are quite ready, we will go," he said, as they arose from the table.

"I am quite ready; my bill is settled, and my trunks sent off by an express van, and there is nothing to detain us longer than will take to fasten my bonnet and cloak," replied Roma.

And five minutes later they were in the carriage rolling up Pennsylvania Avenue. They turned up Fifteenth Street, and drove northward for a mile or so, then turned to the west into a newly opened street, and drove on between commons and bits of woodland left standing on either side until they came to the Wesleyan Flats—a new block of red brick buildings, four stories high, that looked like a slice of the city cut out and set down in the country. It had been run up by a far-sighted speculator, with more of an eye to the profits from rapid growth of the city in the near future than to any very great gain in the present. And it had at first catered for the custom of religious and temperance people, but as these alone did not pay very well, it received all that it could accommodate, just as a hotel would.

Mr. Merritt alighted, handed down his companion, conducted her up a short flight of broad stone stairs, and rang the bell.

The door was promptly opened by a smart colored boy, who bowed the visitors into a small reception

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room, and then went to bring his mistress, the janitress of the establishment.

A stout, rosy-cheeked, black-haired woman, in a widow's dress, but without a widow's cap covering her smoothly parted black hair, came into the room and nodded her welcome.

"Mrs. Brown, this is my ward, the lady of whom I spoke to you and for whom I engaged the rooms," said Mr. Merritt.

Mrs. Brown nodded to the stranger, who returned the salutation by a bow.

"Can we see the rooms now? Are they ready?" he next inquired.

"Yes, sir, quite. I will show you the way," the widow said, and led them to the elevator in the hall.

They got on, and ascended to the second floor and stopped.

There they got out, and she led them down a narrow passage, opened a door on her right hand, and showed them into a large parlor, with windows opening to the west, and giving a view of a piece of woods, through which the beams of the setting sun were now shooting in broken, crimson lines. The room was upholstered in sage-green cretonne, picked out with maroon; a quiet, picturesque, cheerful room.

"I like it much," said Roma, approvingly.

The bedroom and dressing-room, both on a line with the parlor, and with windows looking west, were upholstered in the same colors.

"I am perfectly satisfied with them," said Roma. "And I may stay here a week or a month. Shall I pay you in advance?"

"Oh, no, madam. Mr. Merritt's introduction is quite security enough, I assure you," replied the janitress, who in this instance was also the agent and collector for the landlord.

"Thank you, but I just as lief. Have my trunks come yet?"

"No, madam."

"Then I think that they will be here very soon. When they come, will you have them sent up?"

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"Certainly, madam."

Roma laid off bonnet and fur cloak in the bedroom, and returned to the parlor, accompanied by the lawyer and the janitress.

Mr. Merritt held in his hand a square packet, which he had first brought to the hotel when he came to lunch with Roma, and then brought to this house. He now laid it down on the center table, and said:

"Here, my dear, are the magazines for December and also—just think of it, now on the third week in November!—the Christmas numbers of the London *Graphic* and the London *News*. Is not this taking Time by the forelock?"

"I do think it is the most insolent pulling of the old gentleman's beard. But, oh! thank you so much for bringing them to me, Mr. Merritt!" Roma exclaimed.

"Oh, child, I knew how lonely you would feel, especially on this first evening, in a new lodging, and I brought them to you. There is no panacea for *ennui* like a good story paper or magazine. Now I must be off. Business won't wait for sentiment, or even for friendship. Good-afternoon," said the lawyer; and he turned to go.

"Stop one moment, Mr. Merritt."

"What is it, my child?

" 'Parting is such sweet sorrow,
That we could say good-night until it be to-morrow.'

Is that it, my dear?" inquired the old man, good-humoredly.

"It is this, Mr. Merritt—about Mrs. Harcourt's illness. Was it not to you that Miss Margaret Wynthrop wrote?"

"Yes; of course."

"Well, then, will you please write and ask that young lady how Mrs. Harcourt is now? You must see that, under the circumstances, I cannot write. Mrs. Harcourt thinks, as we all thought, that I married her son. She would wonder that we—Will and myself—do not hurry to her bedside. You will write, please.

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Do not mention my name, but simply say that you do not know the address of Mr. Harcourt, and inquire how Mrs. Harcourt is at present. Will you do this for me?"

"With pleasure, and bring you the answer as soon as I get it."

"And, oh! bring me the decision of the judge as soon as you get that."

"Of course! Of course! But do not feel uneasy. It is sure to be in your favor."

"Ah, but you know 'the glorious uncertainty of the law' is proverbial."

"Yes, in cases where the right and wrong of them are uncertainties; but not in yours, my dear. Be patient and not anxious," said the lawyer; and, with another good-afternoon, he left the room.

The old lawyer and his young client had both either forgotten or disregarded the presence of the janitress, who had heard every word that had passed between them, and now stood with open mouth and eyes staring at her tenant, but too discreet to venture a single question.

Presently she said to Roma:

"There is a restaurant downstairs, ma'am, and you can ring the bell and order anything you like, and have it brought up to you, or you can go down to the saloon and get it there; you would get it hotter there, and many ladies in the house do go down. It is perfectly proper, ma'am. There is no bar. It is more a ladies' than a gentlemen's place, anyhow. Very few gentlemen come here except those living with their families in the house. I should think you would prefer, ma'am, to go down there and get your meals hot and good."

"I thank you; but I should rather take them here in my room, even though they should cool in their passage up," said Roma.

"Oh, as to that, there are chafing dishes, and you be sure to order chops and cutlets on chafing dishes and hot plates, or you won't get them so. They take every advantage, which is natural, I suppose, if not Chris-

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tian—No! I have no interest. The proprietors rent the basement, and I collect the rent of it for the landlord just as I do of the upper rooms. Well, ma'am, if you want anything just ring the bell, and Tom, the porter, will answer. And so I take my leave of you, ma'am," concluded the janitress.

Roma bowed in response, and Mrs. Brown left the room.

Roma went to the window and watched the effect of the sun setting behind the distant Virginia hills on the opposite side of the river, yet sending long lances of crimson hue through the woods within a stones throw of the house.

Presently there was a knock at the door, and a colored boy came in with a gas lighter in his hand—a boy who met her inquiring gaze with a smile full of sweetness and innocence such as Roma had never seen on any other face than a baby's.

"What is your name?" inquired Roma.

"Tom, young mist'ess, wot come f'om de ole Marse Henery Gwine plantashun onto de Oil ob Sturms."

"What!" exclaimed Roma.

"Yes, young mist'ess, dat's so. Mammy an' me, us lef' dere w'en de ole marse lef' an' dey turn de ole place upside down inter a hot-el, an' mammy couldn' stan' it, and so her tuk me, an' comed up yere. I was on'y seben years old den, young mist'ess, but I 'members well. Lemme light de gas now?"

"Yes, if you please," said Roma, wondering at the chance that had brought this young lad, of her old ancestral tribe of negroes, face to face with her in a city strange to both.

The boy was communicative, like all his confiding race.

"Mammy's de cook at de rus'runt downstairs. De ge'man an' ladies tinks a heap o' mammy's cookin'. An' she say, mammy do, ef how her cookin' was good nuff for such an epitaph as ole marse Henery Gwine, it wur good nuff fo' common people like all dese yere ge'man an' ladies was, in 'parison to him, yo' know, young mist'ess, an' no 'fense meant to nobody needer,"

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said the boy, as he proceeded to light the gas jets of the central gasolier.

Roma was tempted to reveal herself as a Guyon by her mother's side, but she refrained.

"Any mo' orders, young mist'ess?" inquired the lad.

Roma had given no order at all as yet, but now she gave one:

"Yes, if you please. Go to the restaurant below, and tell them to send me a service of tea and muffins for one."

"Yes, young mist'ess," the boy said, and vanished.

Her order was promptly obeyed.

A waiter from the saloon below served the required refreshments. She did not want dinner after her late luncheon, but she took her tea with satisfaction, and then rang to have the service removed.

After that she sat down to her "holiday numbers," and soon lost her sense of solitude in imaginary scenes among imaginary people. She retired early to rest, and slept the sleep of sound health.

Thus ended her first day in her new quarters.

The next day, after breakfast, which was served in her room, she went out and took a walk in the piece of woods at the back of the house; then came in and wrote letters; took an early dinner; in the afternoon went out to the northern terminus of the Fourteenth street railroad, took a car and rode down to the avenue to post her letters, returned and took her tea, and spent the evening in reading.

As this day passed, so passed several succeeding ones.

Mr. Merritt did not call for several days, but dropped notes daily, asking her to notify him if she required any service at his hands, and telling her that he should come to her just as soon as he should have anything to communicate.

One noon, the fifth day of her sojourn at the Wesleyan Flats, Mr. Merritt came and found Roma in her apartment writing letters.

"I trust I do not disturb you," he said, after he had given her a good-morning.

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"Not at all," she replied, laying aside her pen, rising and handing him a chair.

He sank into the offered seat with a look of fatigue.

She resumed her seat, and turned inquiring eyes upon him.

"No, my dear," he said, in answer to that mute question, "the judge has not given his decision. Nor have I heard any news of Hanson and his yacht, or of our poor Will Harcourt; but I have had a letter from Miss Wynthrop. She says that Mrs. Harcourt's bodily health is improved, but her mental faculties are still impaired; yet that she has understanding enough to be very anxious to see her son, and she wonders why he does not come to her. Here is the letter, if you would like to read it."

Roma took the paper and perused it. There was no more in it than the news which the lawyer had given her in brief.

She folded it up and returned it to him, murmuring:

"Oh, that I might go to her! Oh, that I might minister to her! But you see that is impossible! She would ask me: 'Where is your husband? Where is my son? Why does he not come to me?' And what could I say in reply? Ah! and where is Will Harcourt all this time? Ah, what a trying position is mine, Mr. Merritt!"

"Yes, my dear, it is, indeed! But be patient, my brave girl. In a few days you will be free, and when you are so you may set all the detective force in the country to find out the fate of Will Harcourt, if he has met with foul play, or to find himself, if he be living, which I really believe him to be, for our devil is not a Moloch. He has neither the malice nor the courage to do murder, nor yet is young Harcourt one who would commit the sin of suicide, however mad he might be. Courage, my brave girl! We will come safely through all these troubles," said the lawyer, taking her hand and pressing it with fatherly affection.

"May Heaven grant us speedy deliverance!" said Roma, earnestly.

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"Amen," responded the lawyer, and soon after he took his leave.

Roma lived a very secluded life in her apartments at the Wesleyan Flats. She made no acquaintances among her fellow lodgers, though now, as the meeting of Congress drew near, the house, like all the lodging and boarding-houses in the city, was beginning to fill up. She only saw her neighbors occasionally, when she would meet one or more in the elevator, going up or down, or in the front hall, below stairs. There were a few men and many women and children, for the place was pre-eminently a family lodging house.

The elevator shaft was almost dark, so that she could never become acquainted with the faces of her neighbors, even if she had looked at them attentively, which she never did.

Nothing, under these circumstances, except her sound and robust health and strength, could have prevented her from suffering some depression.

CHAPTER XXVI

"OWLET"

THE first of December was a very dreary, gloomy day. The sky was darkened in that dull downpour that is so much more cheerless than a furious storm.

Roma sat alone in her room, with a book of Herbert Spencer's in her hand.

She had no cheerful, open fire here, as she had always had in her country home in winter. The house was heated by steam.

She was beginning to be conscious of a new sensation, or, rather, lack of sensation—*ennui*.

She laid down her book with a weary sigh, and, lifting her eyes, saw standing quietly before her the strangest little figure that had ever met her sight.

A little girl, who might have been five years old, or seven, she looked so tiny, and yet had such a wise

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little face. Her costume was as quaint as herself—a dark brown merino frock, longer than children's dresses are usually made, and a round cape that came down to her waist; but the oddest thing about her was her hat, which looked like two high-pointed hats placed one upon another, the upper one being the smallest. Under the double rim of this queer hat was a fringe of brown curls, shading a pair of wondrous, large, solemn brown eyes, that looked out of a thin, brown, grave face, with not the ghost of a childish smile about it.

She stood before the lady, with her black-mittened hands hanging clasped together, looking seriously and thoughtfully up in her face.

"Who are you, little one?" inquired Roma, kindly.

"Owlet," answered the child, without removing her grave regards.

Roma hesitated about the next question. This solemn, small personage was not to be rudely asked, "What do you want?" So Roma, looking at the elf in wonder, inquired:

"Can I do anything for you, my dear?"

"No," replied Owlet, without a motion or a change of expression.

This was discouraging; but Roma tried again.

"Do you want anything, little one?"

"No."

Roma ventured another question—a desperate because a rude one:

"What did you come for, then, my dear?"

"To keep you company."

"Oh! but who sent you?"

"Nobody."

"Then why did you come to keep me company?"

"I sought you was lonesome."

"Dear me!" said Roma, looking wistfully into the thoughtful little face before her.

"Ain't you going to invite me to sit down?" gravely inquired Owlet.

"Why, certainly! I beg your pardon for my remissness, madam! But, you see, I was taken by surprise.

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Pray take this seat," said Roma, drawing forward the large, cushioned armchair usually occupied by the old lawyer on his occasional visits. "I am sorry I have not a seat more suitable to your size."

"This will do twite well," said the imp, climbing up into the chair, turning around and seating herself, with her little legs dangling in front, and her feet unable to touch the ground.

The queen of society was, for the first time in her life, utterly at a loss how to entertain a visitor; but she made up for silence by kindly regards.

"Don't you mean to ask me to take off my hat?" inquired the elf.

"Certainly, ma'am. Pray take off your bonnet," said Roma, with a smile.

The changeling removed the hat that was shaped like two inverted funnels, set one upon the other, and handed it to Roma, who laid it aside, and inquired:

"Won't you take off your cape as well?"

"Yes, thank you. I have come to make a long call," said Owlet, handing over the circular, which Roma laid beside the hat.

Then the lady took another look at the fairy.

Divested of her outer garments, the child was very lovely; a beautiful head, covered all over with soft, dark brown, closely curling hair; pretty, clear, brown face, with all the features tiny, except the great, solemn, dark brown eyes. Such was Owlet.

"Now we talk tomfortable," she said, as she settled herself in the big, cushioned chair.

"Very well. What shall we talk about?" inquired Roma. "Shall I tell you a story?"

"No."

"Not even a fairy story?"

"No."

"But why? Don't you like stories?"

"No."

"But all children like stories."

"I don't."

"Why don't you?"

"Because stories are lies, and it is a sin to tell them.

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I told a story once about not breaking mamma's cologne bottle when I did break it. Mamma found me out, and she locked me in a dark closet all day; and she told me it wasn't a sin to break the bottle, betause I did not mean to do it, but it was a great sin to tell a story; and if I did tell any more stories, I would go to a place much darker and dweffler than the closet when I died. So I never told another story. And so I don't want you to tell stories and go to the dark place," solemnly concluded Owlet.

"Oh, I understand you now. Well, then, shall I tell you a history? A history of Cinderella and the Glass Slipper?"

"Is it true?"

"Well, almost as true as some histories, I suppose. It is true in spirit, if not in fact."

"Well, I don't want to hear it, then. I don't want to go to the dark world. And you might know there is not a grain of truth in it. 'Glass slipper!' You know nobody could ever wear a glass slipper. It's nonsense."

"Well, then, if I am not to tell you stories, how shall I entertain you?"

"We can talk."

"What shall we talk about?"

"You."

"Talk about me? Why should you wish to talk about me?"

"'Cause I like you."

"But you don't know anything about me, child.'

"Yes, I do. You go up and down in the elevator, with me and mamma and ladies and gentlemen, most every day. Only mamma never goes up and down in the elevator now. And Tom he told me you must be so lonesome here all by yourself."

"Who is Tom?" inquired the lady, to draw the child out.

She looked up at the questioner in grave surprise.

"Don't you know who Tom is? Why, Tom is—Tom. He is the little colored gentleman that answers the bells. Don't you know Tom?"

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"Oh, yes, I have that honor. So Tom thinks I am lonesome, does he?"

"Yes; and that is the reason why I have come to keep you company. Mamma is asleep. She took some orpheous to put her to sleep. So I thought I would come down and keep you company."

"What did your mamma take, my dear?"

"Orpheous."

"Orpheous?"

"Yes—no. That was in the pantomime. It wasn't orpheous; it was morpheous."

Roma listened, a little surprised, more interested, but most of all alarmed. The drug morphia was unsafe.

"Is your mother sick, my dear?" Roma inquired, in a sympathizing tone.

"Oh, yes; poor mamma! Such a horrid, horrid cough. And the doctor gives her orpheous—no, that's the pantomime; morpheous, I mean—to stop the cough and make her sleep; and now she is asleep, and she won't miss me. So I thought I would improve the time and come and see you while I had the chance."

Roma gazed at the little speaker with growing bewilderment.

"Who is your mamma, my dear?" she inquired.

The child returned her look with one of incredulous wonder.

"Why, don't you know my mamma?"

"No, dear; how should I?"

"Why, because everybody knows my mamma."

"But I am very ignorant."

"I am so sorry, and you so big. You ought to go to school—but, no; you are too old. But you might have a teacher in the house to post you up in things, like Mad-am-m-wow-zelle Cher-u-bine had," said the child, pronouncing the foreign name slowly and carefully, so that she might do it right.

"Who is Mademoiselle Cherubine?"

"Don't you know even that? Why, you don't know anything! Mad-am-mwow-zelle Cher-u-bine was the French dancer and Queen of the Fairies, in the panto-

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mime of Morpheus—no, Orpheous—how I do get the words mixed!—at the Strand Theater, in London; and she was beautiful, and she was going to marry a lord. Just think of a man being called 'lord.' I think it is downright sinful."

"So mademoiselle was going to marry a lord, was she?" inquired Roma, amused by the quaintness of the child's prattle.

"She was," gravely replied the changeling. "And he was so old—so old—like Father Time in the pantomime and she was ignorant—so very ignorant—worse than you, for you can read. I saw you reading when I came in. But she—why, they said she didn't know B from a bull's foot! That's what the ladies and gentlemen of the ballet said about her. And she had to have a teacher to post her up."

"Yes; but you haven't told me yet who your mamma is."

"Well, I will tell you now. She is the cel-e-bra-ted Mad-ame Nouvellini, of the The-a-ter Frong-say, in Par-ree. And you never heard of her?"

"I am mortified to admit that I never have. She never played in this country, did she?"

"No, she never played in this country, and never played in Par-ree after she first met papa. She came with him to London and played at the Strand The-a-ter; but after papa left us she never played again."

"Poor child! Then your papa is dead, and your mother and yourself are orphan and widow?" said Roma.

"Yes, but that was many, many years ago. I do not remember papa at all."

" 'Many years ago.' It is not considered very polite to inquire into a lady's age, I am afraid; but I should really like to know how old you are."

"Oh, I don't mind telling my age. I was five years old last Guy Fox's Day," said Owlet.

At this moment there came a rap at the door, followed by the entrance of Tom, who said:

"Miss Catherine, your mammy wants you."

"Good-by," said Owlet. "I will come whenever I

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can to keep you company." And she vanished through the door.

"Come here, Tom," said Roma, arresting the departure of the boy.

"Yes, young mist'ess, yere I is."

"Who is that little girl?"

"Dat young one jes' gone out?"

"Yes."

"Oh, she! She is Miss Catherine Newellini—Madame Newellini's little gal."

"And who is Madame Newellini?"

" 'Deed I dunno, young mist'ess; but she had been yere long 'fo' you come."

"How long?"

"I yeckon how she's been yere mos' a year; winter 'n' summer an' fall. She nebber goes now'ere, an' nebber sees no wisitors no mo'n yo'se'f, young mist'ess. An' dat's her yittle gal dat chile is, and she hasn't got no 'musements but jes' yiding up an' down the elewator. I tole her come an' scrape 'quaintances long o' you, 'caze you was lonesome, too. Was dat yong, mist'ess?"

"Oh, no!" Roma replied, smiling. "But the mother —she is ill, I fear. Is she not?"

"Yes, young mist'ess. In 'sumption, I yeckon. De ole madam downstairs, Missus B'own, do say as she is, an' de Lord knows wot's a gwine to come o' dat chile w'en its moder dies."

"Has she not money?"

"Yeckon not, mist'ess, by all 'counts, an' all 'pearances, too. She do poy de yent fo' dat cocklofty room she libs in, but dat's 'bout all she ken manage to do, 'cording to wot de old madam say. An' she do lib on nex' to nuffin; herse'f an' de little gal lib on milk and b'ead. Say, young mist'ess, ef you's got loads ob money, like I yeckon you hab, it would be yale Christom charity to scrape 'quaintance long o' dat po' white lady, so yo' could help her, neighborly like."

"I think so myself, Tom. But why should you suppose that I have 'loads of money'?"

"Lor', young mist'ess, yo' mus' hab to take dese

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yere 'spensive yooms—de berry bes' in de house—all to yo'se'f, an' yo' meals sarved up to yo' yere; an' eben 'ploy de bigges' kind ob a wig ob a lawyer to ten' to yo' 'fairs."

Roma laughed at the boy's reasoning. The boy stared at her, and then said:

"Yo' 'minds me powerful ob ole Marse Henery Gwine sometimes. 'Deed, Lor' knows yo' do, young mist'ess. I warn't mo'n seben year ole w'en I knowed him, but I'll nebber fo'get him, long's ebber I lib, and yo' do 'mind me powerful ob him. Dat was wot made me so bole as to tell de chile to scrape 'quaintance long ob you, hopin' as it might lead to doin' somefin' fo' dat po' w'ite lady upstairs; 'caze I did year mammy say as nobody, man, lady or chile, w'ite or black or mix', ebber was 'lowed to suffer ef dey was in yeach ob de Gwines; an' how, ef dere was a Gwine in dis house, dat po' w'ite lady wouldn't be 'lowed to want fo' nuff to yeat. Den, 'caze yo' mind me ob a Gwine anyways, I jes' spoke to de little gal 'bout you'. But doan yo' go an' make no 'stakes 'bout her, young mist'ess. She ain't no beggar. All I say to her, I say:

"'Dat po' w'ite lady in dem pooty yooms is mons'rous lonesome, all alone by herse'f.' Dat was all I say; an' de good little t'ing she took it on herse'f to go an' keep yo' company w'ile her mamma was asleep. Now, young mist'ess, I mus' go—'deed I mus'. Ole madam downstairs'll be arter me ef I doant. Good-arternoon, young mist'ess."

"Good-afternoon, Tom," returned the lady.

And when the boy had left the room Roma meditated how she could best serve the suffering invalid upstairs without offense.

An opportunity soon offered itself.

On the very next day, while the rain still fell in torrents, Roma was sitting at her table, writing a letter, when she heard a noise in the passage leading to her room, which was followed by a quick rap at her door and the entrance of Tom, bearing the almost lifeless form of little Owlet in his arms. She was bleeding from a cut on her forehead.

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Roma sprang up and hastened to take the child from the boy.

"How did this happen?" she rapidly inquired, as she sat down with the child across her lap, and began to stanch the blood with her handkerchief.

"I allers telled Miss Catherine not to be so yeckless jumpin' on de elewater so sudden, an' she did jump on to it jes' as it were a-goin' up an' fo' I could stop it; an' she fell on her fo'ed dat way an' cut it open like dat. I was feared to tote her into her mammy, fear it might kill dat po', sick w'ite lady to do it sudden; so's dere warn't nobody else in dat dere elewater but she an' I, I did jes' tote her wight in yere. Is she berry bad, young mist'ess?"

"I hope not. A blow on the forehead is not so bad as a blow on any other part of the head. See! She is opening her eyes," said Roma, as she arose and bore the child into her chamber, laid her on the bed, and began to loosen her clothes.

The boy followed and watched every movement of the lady.

Roma washed and bathed the wound, and put a cold, wet compress on it and bound it up. Roma had become something of a nurse and domestic doctress ever since she had entered on her estates. Every mistress of a plantation has to be such.

She went to her traveling medicine chest, and found a plaster and a restorative, and after a while unbound the wound, applied the plaster, and administered the restorative.

The boy watched her all through the performance. Owlet had opened and shut her eyes several times since Roma had taken her from Tom, but Roma had not spoken to her, thinking that it was better that she should be left in quiet. But now the child spoke.

"Please, I'm not hurt much. Please, let me go to mamma."

"Yes, dear, I will take you to her very soon. But won't you please stay with me a little while, to keep me company, you know? I am really lonesome," said Roma, diplomatically.

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"Oh, yes; if you want me to do so; but I was afraid I should be troublesome, and mamma told me I must never be troublesome to anybody but her," the child replied.

"But you are not at all troublesome, dear little Owlet, and I should be very glad if you would stay with me a little while."

"Very well, then, I will. Tom!" she said, seeing the boy standing at the foot of the bed.

"Yes, Miss Catherine."

"Mamma is awake. Will you please go and tell her that I am staying to keep company a little while with a lonesome lady, and she will bring me back to her in an hour?"

"Yes, Miss Catherine."

"You will go back with me to my mamma, will you not?" she inquired, while Tom prudently lingered to hear the answer.

"Yes, my dear, with great pleasure," said Roma.

"I thought you would. And I do want you to see my mamma."

Tom shot out of the room, but she called him back before he was out of hearing.

"Tom!"

"Don't you tell mamma I was hurt. I am not much hurt, you know."

"No, Miss Catherine."

"Now go."

The boy started away, but soon came back again with a message:

"Your mammy say how she's gwine to sleep now. How yo' may stay long o' de lady ef yo' doane be troublesome. But ef yo's troublesome, how she hopes de lady will sen' yo' 'way."

"All right, Tom; I won't be troublesome. Now, you had better run away, or else Mrs. Brown will be after you with a sharp stick," said the child.

Tom grinned, and displayed a double row of fine ivories as he left the room, muttering he "wasn't feared o' no Mis' Brown an' no sharp sticks. She warn't nuffin'."

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Roma now knew that the child was not seriously hurt. She had been stunned by the fall, and her forehead had been cut by coming in contact with some sharp object; that was all.

It was Roma's luncheon hour. She rang and ordered the repast to be served for two. By the time it was placed upon her table in her parlor, little Owlet had recovered, and was chattering away with—for her—unusual volubility.

She sat down with Roma and enjoyed the treat.

"How I wish mamma had some of these nice stewed oysters!" she said.

"Does your mamma like oysters?" inquired Roma.

"She used to like them; but I don't think she does now. She never gets any."

Roma remembered, with a pang, the tale told her by Tom of "the poor wite lady's" poverty and privations.

After their luncheon Roma read to the child, and amused her until late in the afternoon. Then Tom put in his head in the door, and announced that Miss Catherine's mamma had rung for him and told him to tell Miss Catherine that she was awake and wanted her.

"Come, my dear," said Roma, "I will take you up to your mother. And you will come and keep me company whenever you like and she does not want you."

"I am ready," said the quaint creature, putting her hand in that of her friend.

They went up in the elevator quite to the top of the house, to the Mansard floor, and there got out onto a dark passage, down which they walked, past several rooms, until they came to one whose door stood partly open, emitting a little light.

"This is mamma's room; not a nice room like yours, or like mamma used to have. Come in."

Roma entered, hand in hand with the child. The room was small, not more than five feet by nine, and badly lighted with one small dormer window at the end, opposite the door, and meagerly furnished, with one imitation maplewood bedstead, and its fittings, one cane chair, and one washstand, above which hung a small mirror. This was all the furniture, if we ex-

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cept a row of hooks on the wall, from which hung the scanty outer garments of the mother and child.

On the chair, by the bed, sat a young woman, whose emaciated figure, hollow cheeks, hectic flush and burning eyes showed the ravishing waste of consumption. She was wrapped in a rose-colored silk robe, trimmed with fine lace, which had once been a beautiful and elegant négligée, but was now faded and torn. She was a pure brunette, and had evidently once been a brilliant beauty, but all that was gone now; nor was there the least trace of any resemblance between her and her child. She sat wearily, uneasily, in that little, hard, straight-backed chair.

As soon as she saw Roma, and her eyes met those of the lady, she held out her hand in piteous welcome, even as if she now received some friend for whose coming she had prayed.

Roma placed her hand in that of the sufferer, and simply said:

"I have brought your little girl back to you."

"Oh, she is hurt!" cried the mother, turning pale at the sight of the plaster on the child's forehead.

"No, mamma, no! it is only a little tiny cut, and it don't hurt me one bit now!" eagerly exclaimed Owlet.

"How did it happen?" questioned the mother. And then a terrible fit of coughing seized her and shook her fragile frame nearly to dissolution.

Roma regarded her with unspeakable compassion as she shook and swayel about in the uneasy chair.

"Oh, if she will only permit me to make her comfortable!" she thought.

When the dreadful paroxysm was over, the sufferer essayed again to ask the question, but the child forestalled it by saying:

"I just fell down, mamma; that was all; just fell down, and cut my forehead a little bit, and this lady put a plaster on it, and it don't hurt me one bit now; no, not one bit!"

"Oh, I thank you! I thank you so much, dear madam," said the mother, catching Roma's hand and kissing it.

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"Do you not think you would be easier lying down?" inquired Roma.

"Oh, no; I am better sitting up."

"But in such an uncomfortable chair," said Roma.

"Truly, it is not very restful; but—it is the only one I have got. And—I am keeping you standing, madam. Pray, pardon me, and—take a seat," she said, trying to rise and offer her chair to the visitor, but she dropped helplessly again into her first position.

"Please let me sit here," said Roma, seating herself on the side of the bed. "I wish," she continued, with as much hesitation as she would have felt in presuming to offer favors to Mrs. Harcourt or any other Southern grandame—"I do wish you would allow me to send you the resting-chair out of my room. I am well and strong, and do not need it at all."

"Oh; could you spare it to me? Oh, would you do it? You are so good! It would be a rest to me. Yes, it is true. This—well—you see—I cannot lie down—and I cannot rest—sitting in this uncomfortable chair—and it would be a great boon."

Another fearful fit of coughing seized and shook her.

Roma looked on her with unutterable pity; but no longer with the despair of helplessness. She knew now that she could help this creature without giving offense. This was not one of Mrs. Harcourt's order; she was not troubled with sensitive pride. She might have been a ballet dancer; might have "graduated" from comic opera houses; might have lived in "Bohemia" all her life, and yet that life had left her humble, simple and confiding as a child. Roma felt that, without wounding her self-esteem, she could help her to her own heart's content. She drew closer to the poor thing, took her hand affectionately, and said:

"We are children of one Heavenly Father. It is our duty, and should be our delight, to help one another, and the one who can give help should do it without the least thought that she is doing any favor, and the one who receives help should take it without any

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thought that she is receiving any. You understand me, dear sister?"

"I understand how, in your goodness, you wish to put the situation. And I know what you mean. And I know the Blessed Virgin has sent you to my aid."

"Then, my dear, you will make me happy by letting me help you all I can. Now, I will not send the chair up to you; but will take you down to the chair. You must leave this room and come with me at once to my apartments. Can you walk, with the support of my arm, to the elevator? If not, I can easily carry you."

The childlike creature essayed to raise herself to her feet, but sank back and fell into a third fit of coughing.

"How thoughtless and cruel it was of me to make her talk!" said Roma to herself, as she waited until the convulsive throes were over.

"Owlet, little woman, have you anything to give mamma to revive her after these paroxysms?" inquired Roma, as the patient sank back exhausted.

"No," answered the small laconic.

"Well, dear, go out in the passage and ring up the elevator. I am going to take mamma down to my room."

"Oh! are you? I am so glad! She'll get well, then?" exclaimed the child, darting out of the room, and pulling the call bell. In another moment she cried out:

"It is coming up!"

Roma lifted the sick woman in her strong arms as easily as a man could have lifted Owlet.

"Now, put your arms around my neck and hang on me, dear," she said, as she bore the poor creature out of the room.

"Oh, you are so good to me! so good! I feel as if you were my own mother and I was your baby, in my helplessness," the sufferer said.

"Yes, dear; that is right. I will be a true mother to you so long as you want me," Roma replied, without a smile at the absurdity of a widow thirty-five or forty years of age calling herself a baby, and her—a maiden of twenty-two—her "mother." No; for the poor widow

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was weak, helpless and confiding as any child, and the maiden was strong, robust and self-reliant as any Amazon.

Roma carried Marguerite Nouvellini to the elevator, which was waiting. She entered it, followed by Owlet, who was solemnly delighted.

And so they descended to the second floor and came out upon the hall leading to Roma's apartments. With her charge still in her arms and on her breast, Roma entered her parlor, and laid the invalid in a large, deep-cushioned, elastic armchair.

"Oh, this is like heaven!" breathed poor Marguerite Nouvellini, as she sank into its luxurious and restful depths.

Ubiquitous Tom was peeping in through the open door, grinning from ear to ear. The dream of his life was fulfilled; the goal of his scheming was reached.

"We did it! Didn't we, Miss Catherine?" he whispered to Owlet.

"We did that, Tom. But mind you leave word downstairs that when mamma's doctor comes he will stop on this floor, at No. 66," said the little, wise woman.

"All right."

CHAPTER XXVII

ROMA'S FAMILY

WELL that the wise little Owlet gave that direction to Tom concerning Madame Nouvellini's doctor, for the first man he saw when he went down to his post in the hall was Dr. Mix, who was making directly for the elevator.

"Please, Marse Doctor," said the boy, pulling his wool by way of an obeisance.

"Yes, my lad; what is it?"

"De po' sick w'ite lady wot yo' comes to see is come down out'n de ruff ob de house, an' is stayin' 'long o' de rich young lady in No. 66."

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"Ah!—oh;—she is! Living there?" inquired the doctor.

"Yes, please, marster; libin' dere."

"Well, you must show me where No. 66 is. Come along."

Tom followed the doctor to the elevator, and went up with him to the second floor, where they got out and walked to No. 66.

At the doctor's order the boy went on first, and said to Roma:

"Please, young mist'ess, the dotcor is come. Mus' I denounce him inter dis yoom?"

"I will go out and speak to him first," said the young lady; and leaving her protégée dozing in the arm-chair, she passed into the hall expecting to find a stranger.

But the doctor, a tall, portly, bald-headed man of seventy years, stepped quickly up to her with out-stretched hand, exclaiming:

"Why, Roma, my dear child, is this you? How do you do? How do you do? I haven't seen or heard of you for two years past. What have you been doing with yourself? Eh? Getting married? Eh, eh?"

"No, doctor; not getting married," replied Roma, who was essentially truthful, but who could never be brought to recognize the fraudulent ceremony that had been imposed upon her as a marriage.

"Not married yet! Eh, eh, eh? Must be hard to please, young woman! Had a score of lovers when I met you here two winters ago. And the sparkling widow—she's married, I'll be bound!"

"Oh, yes; Aunt Ruth is married to Mr. Gray, the new consul for Delfcome, and gone abroad with him."

"I knew it! Let the widows alone for marrying, every time! You see they know all about it, my dear. That is the difference between them and the girls. Eh, eh, eh? But why have not you followed so good an example? Eh, eh, eh? Tell me that."

"I will tell you later. But, doctor, let me return your own complaint and question: I have not seen anything of you for these two years past. Now, what

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have you been doing with yourself? Eh, eh, eh?" inquired the young lady, with humorous imitation of the old physician's manner.

"Been traveling, my good child—all around the world and back again—for the benefit of my own health, and, a cynic might say, for that of my patients' also. Just got back ten days ago; have scarcely got into harness yet. But, my dear, I am looking for a poor young patient of mine—moved into No. 66. I believe this is it."

"Yes, this is the room. She is with me—I am taking care of her."

"You!"

"Yes. I found her by chance, sick, friendless, destitute, and have brought her into my apartments—a simple matter.

"But—are you living here?" exclaimed the doctor, lifting his brows in surprise.

"For the present, yes."

"With whom?"

"With no one except this invalid and her child."

"Lord bless my soul! What is the meaning of it all?"

"I will tell you later, doctor; any day that you may have leisure to call on me. Now I wish to talk to you of Madame Nouvellini, before you go in to see her."

"Certainly! certainly! I would like to hear your report."

"She is dozing now, but has had several severe fits of coughing, and she cannot lie down. I wish you to look upon me as her nurse, and give me every direction you would give to a regular nurse," said Roma.

"Ah—hum! Well, I don't understand. But you will explain by and by," said the doctor, looking contemplatively upon the young woman before him.

"Tell me one thing, doctor: is it possible for her to recover?"

"Look at her and receive your answer, my dear child."

"I understand you. I thought so. Now, doctor, I

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suppose all I can do for her is to make her remaining days as comfortable and happy as possible."

"Yes; that is all. But what is to become of that strange child when she is gone. Heaven only knows."

"Oh! I shall take the child if no kindred come to claim her."

"You!" again exclaimed the doctor.

"Yes, indeed! Why not?"

"It would be a rash and reckless proceeding."

"I do not think so."

"But it would be so. What do you know of her parentage beyond the fact that she is the child of this sick woman? What do you know of inherited evils that may bring great trouble upon her and through her, upon yourself? Beware, Roma!"

"Since I know nothing of her inherited evils, I will impute none to the babe of five years old. If she should be left destitute, I will adopt her," said the young lady, with firmness.

"Better get her into an orphan asylum."

"Never, while I have a home to give her. I will adopt her if her mother will leave her to me."

"Very well, dear, as you will. But, Roma, dear, I must give you one warning in regard to my patient. Near as she is to death, she does not know it. She does not suspect it. She doesn't even think of it. She thinks of life, of getting well, and of doing great things when she does get well. And it is lucky for her that she is in such a state of hopefulness. Consumption is a proverbially flattering malady, and consumptives are proverbially confident of recovery, but she is the most confident invalid I ever met. Give her everything she wants, my dear, and let her do just as she pleases. Such a course of treatment, or rather indulgence, will make her happy and do her no harm—will not shorten days that are already numbered. And now I will go in and take a look at her," said the doctor.

And Roma opened the door and preceded him into the room.

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Their entrance awakened the dozing woman. She smiled on seeing the doctor, and said:

"You can find a seat here, sir. There are plenty, you see."

He drew a chair to her side, and took her hand.

"I feel better already down here, doctor. The air is so soft down here, and this chair is so restful. It is like paradise down here," she said, without waiting to be questioned.

"Yes, you are certainly much better"—"down here," he added to himself. "And you will need no more medicine, I think, only rest and nourishment. What would you like to eat?"

"Can I have anything I want?"

"Yes, anything in the world."

"Then I am longing for some green turtle soup."

"But I am afraid this is not the season for green turtle soup," said the doctor, dubiously.

"Oh, that makes no matter. They have it canned downstairs in the restaurant. I saw it when I used to take my meals there, before I was laid up. And, oh, I did so long for some."

"Very well! You shall have that, or anything else you crave, if it can be got for you. You are doing very well. Good-by, good-by! I will see you again to-morrow."

The doctor left the room, attended by the lady.

"My dear, I am not going to praise you for what you are doing for this poor creature. It is your whim to do it, and nothing but pure selfishness in the gratification of a whim," said the physician, when they had reached the outside of the room.

"It is quite true, doctor. A very little introspection shows me that it is nothing else," said Roma, frankly.

"Except an invaluable service and blessing to that poor woman," added the physician, in a softened tone, as he stumped off toward the elevator. "She is a good and great creature, this Roma of ours," he concluded, as he went down and left the house.

The green turtle soup was served in excellent style to the invalid, who consumed every morsel of the

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meal, which was certainly a lavish allowance for one person. She did not ask for "more," like poor, little Oliver Twist, though she looked as if she wanted it; nor did Roma press her to take another supply just then, for she feared for the delicate creature's digestion.

After that the invalid slept in her chair.

But Roma was meditating the possibility of procuring for her a still more comfortable chair—one in which she could recline at any angle she might like, and change her position at will.

"Come here, Owlet," she said to the solemn child, who was sitting quite still in the other armchair.

Owlet slid off her seat and came to her friend.

"Owlet," whispered the lady, "I am going down on Pennsylvania Avenue to see if I can find a more comfortable chair for your mamma. Do you stay with her until I come back. If she should wake and want anything to eat or drink, ring and order it up from the restaurant for her. Do you understand?"

"I do," gravely replied the little, old baby.

"Very well. I shall not be gone long."

Roma slipped into her bedroom, put on her storm cloak and felt hat, and hurried to the elevator while drawing on her gloves.

It was pouring rain when she went out; but when Roma had an errand, no weather ever kept her in or did her harm.

She hoisted her umbrella and sallied forth. It was a very wet walk along the sloppy side pavement, under the floods of rain, but Roma was in her waterproofs.

When she reached the northern terminus of the Fourteenth street railway she found an empty car about to start.

She got in and rode halfway down to the avenue before other passengers began to stop the car and enter, and before she reached the terminus the car was full of men in dripping waterproofs with dripping umbrellas, that made a pool of the floor and a vapor of all the space between that and the roof.

Roma was glad to get out at the southern terminus,

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where she took a cab from the stand, and told the driver to take her to the largest furniture store on the avenue. There she was set down.

The bad weather made business slack that day. The proprietor and all his assistants were at leisure to wait on the lady if she had required them all.

When she made known her wishes, she was shown through all the warerooms, until she found not only exactly what she wanted, but something much better than she could have hoped or expected.

"A chair, ma'am, that converts illness into enjoyment," said the proprietor, as he unfolded the reclining couch and explained all its comforts and advantages.

Roma saw that he did not much exaggerate the merits of the machine, and at once purchased it, and ordered it to be sent home immediately.

Then she left the warehouse, re-entered the cab, and directed the driver to take her at once to the Wesleyan Flats. She had no mind to re-enter the nauseous vapor of a street car on a pouring, rainy day. An hour's drive brought her to the door. She paid off the cab, and hurried to the elevator, and quickly reached her apartment.

There she found her invalid sitting up in her chair, wide awake, with a little table before her, on which stood a tea service, with cream toast, buttered muffins, poached eggs and broiled chicken. She was eating ravenously. And Owlet was standing on the other side of the table, waiting on her, pouring out her tea, cutting her chicken, and doing all that was needed with solemn carefulness.

Roma had cast off all her wet waterproofs in the hall outside, lest she should bring dampness and cold to the invalid.

Now she went to her side, and said:

"You are looking so much better! I know you must feel better, also."

"Oh, yes! ever so much. I am sure, I shall soon get well if you let me stay down here. I have not had a hard fit of coughing since I came into this room. It

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was the smoke and gas from the little stove up there that kept me coughing so much. But here the soft heat of the steam pipes is so soothing to me. There are no steam pipes on the top floor, you know."

"No, I didn't know. But do not talk any more just now, or you may start a cough," said Roma.

And the consumptive stopped speaking, and resumed eating until she had cleared the platters.

Then Owlet, without being told, rang for the service to be taken away.

And immediately after this was done, Madame Marguerite lay back in her chair, closed her eyes and went to sleep.

"She may get better and live months, or even years yet, if she can eat and sleep as well as she has done to-day," Roma thought, as she looked at the childish face of the profound sleeper.

Roma did not wish to disturb her by ringing for her own tea, so, for the first time, she went down to the restaurant and took it there. She also had a pitcher of new milk and a plate of bread and butter and cake put on a small tray, which she herself took up to little Owlet, and which that grave, small personage disposed of with much satisfaction, but so quietly as not to disturb the sleeper even with the jingle of a spoon. Roma put the empty vessels out on the table in the hall to be taken down by Tom when he should next make his appearance.

The sleeper slept on until the hidden sun went down and night lowered.

Roma forebore even to light the gas lest it should rouse her. And she sat on the sofa with Owlet beside her, both as silent as the dead.

Presently Marguerite stirred and spoke:

"Is any one here?—Owlet!" she said, softly.

"Here I am, mamma! Only waiting for you to wake up!" exclaimed the child, going to her at once.

"We are both here, dear. Will it hurt your eyes or your head if I light the gas?" inquired Roma.

"Oh, no, indeed! My eyes are as strong as they can

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be, and my head never aches. I love the light," said Marguerite.

Roma lighted the gas and turned to look at her protégée, who was smiling with pleasure.

"Oh, you don't know how much better I feel!" she said.

At that moment there was a little noise on the outside of the door, and Roma opened it to see what was the matter.

Tom and another boy were standing in the hall with a great, covered-up chair between them.

"It's fer yo', young mist'ess," he said.

"Take off the canvas and bring it in, then," said the lady.

She returned to her room, when presently the boys brought the beautiful couch chair, all upholstered in sage-green velvet, picked out with dark crimson and gold. They set it down in the middle of the floor, took, each, the "quarter" that Roma gave him, touched, each, his cap and left the room.

"Oh, what a beauty!" softly exclaimed the sick woman, gazing at it in admiration and covetousness.

'It is for you, dear——" began Roma; but she was stopped by the childish delight of Marguerite.

"Oh, for me!—for me! You are so good—too good!" she said, gasping for breath.

"There, don't excite yourself. I will arrange it for you to sit in. I think you can sleep in it almost, indeed, quite as comfortably as you could sleep in a bed."

"Oh, much more so, for you know I could not lie down flat."

Roma arranged the chair at about the same angle of the armchair, and then gently lifted Marguerite and sat her down in it.

"Oh, this is heavenly!" sighed the poor soul.

Roma guided her right hand to a little brass knob on the right side of the chair, and said:

"Now, see here, a little child, sitting in this chair, could work this. You have only to turn it up or down, to lower or raise yourself at will. Now, try."

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"Oh, this is delightful," said Marguerite, after she had tried the experiment once or twice.

"I think if you will lower the plane a little every day you will, at length, find that you can lie nearly flat," said Roma. "And, now, you must not talk so much. As you are wide awake I will read to you or talk, just as you please."

"Talk," said the sick woman.

"Then you must only answer in monosyllables," said the lady.

"Yes," assented Marguerite.

At this moment Owlet came up and gravely kissed her mamma. Then she held out her hand to Roma, and said:

"Good-night."

"'Good-night!' Why, what do you mean, dear?"

"It is eight o'clock. That is my bedtime. I am going upstairs to bed," said Owlet.

"What! by yourself?"

"Yes."

"But, my child, why can you not sleep down here with us?" inquired the lady.

"You never invited me," said Owlet, very gravely.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, ma'am, but I really thought that there were some things to be taken for granted. Your staying down here with your mamma and myself, for instance," said Roma.

"Of course, Catherine, you are to stay down here, with me and this dear lady!" said Marguerite, forgetting her promise of silence. "Any child but you would have known it; but, indeed, I sometimes fear that you are not possessed of common sense."

"Do you mean it?" inquired the child, turning to Roma.

"Mean what, my dear?"

"Mean that I may stay here."

"Of course I do, if you will do me the grace. I would not like to coerce so wise a little woman," Roma replied.

"Then I think you are very good to me. But it will

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be one more mouth to feed, and that much more expense, you see," said Owlet, shaking her head.

"The child is an idiot—a perfect idiot—but she means no offense, poor little thing!" sighed Marguerite.

"And I am sure I take none," laughed Roma.

"Where must I go to bed?" inquired the child, looking around.

"You will have to sleep with me for this one night; but to-morrow I will try to get you a nice little folding bed, so that you can sleep in this room with your mamma."

"But will not mamma be lonesome here by herself?"

"Not so lonesome as she would be if you were up in the attic. Besides, dear, I shall leave the broad doors between the two rooms wide open, and wheel your mamma's bed-chair up near the doors and keep the gas burning low all night, and put a little silver bell by her, so that she can ring it and wake us if she should want anything. Will that do?"

"Yes, quite well, I think."

"Come, then, I will put you to bed," said Roma.

"No, thank you. I can put myself to bed if you will show me where to go."

Roma took her hand and led her into the inner room.

"That will do, thank you. Please leave me now, if you don't mind. I wish to shut the door for a little while to say my prayers."

Roma closed the door on the oddity and returned to her protégée.

"Oh! I hope you won't mind Catherine. I don't think she is right in her mind, or ever was so. But you see she has never been taught good manners, and she knows no better; and she has never been with other children, and has learned nothing from them. A solitary, ignorant, poor child!" sighed Marguerite, apologetically.

"I like her very much. She charms me by her quaintness and her outspoken frankness," Roma replied.

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A knock at the door was followed by the entrance of Tom, who came rather mysteriously up to Roma, and whispered:

"Dat ole ge'man wot fetch yo' here, young mist'ess, is outside. I tell him, I did, as I couldn't denounce him into yo' yoom 'dout yo' leave, 'caze yo' had a sick lady wisitin' long o' yer. An' he said—ole marse did—as would yo' come out in de hall an' speak to him ef yo' couldn't 'ceive him in yo' yoom, 'caze, he said—ole marse did—as he had somefin to tell you—he had."

"I will go to him directly," Roma exclaimed.

"No!" cried the woman in the chair. "Let the boy wheel me into your bedroom. I can sit there while you receive your friend. I do not want to occupy your parlor to the exclusion of your friends."

Roma received the suggestion favorably, turned to the boy and said:

"As soon as we have left the room go and invite Mr. Merritt to come in, and tell him that I will be with him in a few minutes."

Then she pushed back the sliding doors between the chamber and the parlor, and went herself to the back of the chair and pushed it into the bed-chamber.

"Oh, what a wonderful chair this is!" cried Marguerite. "It can wheel, it can rock, it can stand still. It can sit up straight, it can recline at any angle, and it can lie flat. It is a chair, a carriage and a bed all in one."

"I am so glad it pleases you," smiled Roma.

Little Owlet had finished her prayers and gone to bed, where she lay quite still.

"Now go to your friend; who is he?"

"Mr. Merritt. He was my guardian and trustee. He is now my lawyer, conducting a suit for me."

"Go to him, then."

Roma left her protégée sitting in the chair, her child fast asleep in the bed, and went into the room where Mr. Merritt sat in the big armchair waiting for her.

"Well, my dear," he said, rising and advancing toward her, "I congratulate you. I bring you good

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news. Judge Arbuckle rendered his decision to-day. You are free!"

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Roma.

"I only came to announce the fact that I should like to have told you hours ago if I could have come; but I have been screwed to business all day."

"Oh, how glad and grateful I am to receive it at last! Pray, sit down—it is but a few minutes after eight—and tell me all about it. I feel sure that you have something else to tell—something better still, if anything could better the best," exclaimed Roma, dropping into her own seat.

"It is true, my dear. It is something better still. You are not only now free; but you have never been bound!"

"Thank Heaven again! That does better the best!" exclaimed Roma, fervently.

"Yes; the judge, after mature deliberation and consultation with his brethren of the bench, has given his decision that the marriage ceremony—which was no more than a ceremony—was fraudulent and illegal, and that William Hanson was never your husband in law any more than he was in fact."

"Thank Heaven!" again exclaimed Roma.

"Oh, my dear, I shudder when I think of your perils in the power of that scoundrel on the lonely island," said the lawyer.

"I was never in his power. I had a final means of escape, and should not have hesitated to use it in extremity."

"What do you mean, Roma?"

"My father's pistol, given me for my own protection in those troublesome days of the war, when it was not safe for a woman to go through the country alone."

"Roma, you would not have used that pistol on yourself?"

"Not at all; but on him, most assuredly."

"You would have killed him?"

"No; but I should have lamed him for life. I am an excellent shot, and I should have shattered his leg with a bullet and had him at my mercy. That would

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have rendered him just as harmless as if I had shot him dead. It would have saved me from worse than death, and given him time for repentance and reformation. You know I did keep him at bay with a pistol."

"Yes, Roma, my young Amazon, your heroism saved you. And now what are you going to do?"

"First of all, think of some thank offering for this great deliverance."

"I think you are making a most acceptable one even now."

"Why—what?"

"That bright Tom, who would not let me come in until he asked your leave, explained to me that you had found a poor, forlorn widow and her child, sick and destitute, in the attic of this house, and had taken her into your rooms."

"Yes; but what of that? I give you back your own words about yourself and apply them to myself: 'I do not know how much of benevolence and how much of mere self-complacency enters into the action.'"

"Bah! But there is one thing, Roma, you should consider—your own health. It is not prudent to have a woman in the last stage of consumption shut up with you in the close quarters of your apartments, at this season, too, when you cannot keep the windows open all the time."

"There is no help for the case, Mr. Merritt. There is not another vacant room in the house except that from which I took her, and which was killing her even faster than her disease."

"But your health, my dear."

"Oh, my health! I have—sublime health. If I were to sleep with that dying woman in my arms, she could not hurt my health, while my health might pass to her and keep her alive a little longer. Good heavens! why should I not give her the comfort of my warm room and my company, as well as other help?"

"Are you going to remain in Washington during the season?" abruptly inquired the lawyer, changing the subject.

"I do not know. That will depend on circumstances.

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If my protégée were well enough to travel I should take her to Goblin Hall at once, for it is there I wish to go; but as she is not, I will remain here until she is able to go with me; or, if that should not be, until she is released by death. Then I shall take the child and go to Goblin Hall."

"Take the child, Roma?"

"Yes, unless some one with the right to claim her should do so."

"Well, well. You will stay here. And that scoundrel may come and annoy you."

"I am not afraid of him. If he should trouble me, I should give him in charge of a policeman."

"Well, you have pluck as well as self-control. I will say that for you. And now as to Will Harcourt?"

"Oh, my dear Will! Oh, my poor Will!" gasped Roma, with a great suppressed sob.

"Do you still hold to your opinion that he is entirely guiltless in this affair of the fraudulent ceremony?"

"I hold to my unalterable conviction that he is entirely innocent of any part in it. I do not understand how the fraud was so successfully accomplished so far as the mere ceremony was concerned, nor do I conjecture the mystery of Will Harcourt's sudden disappearance on the night of our intended wedding day; but I do know that he was blameless."

"Well, your faith is something wonderful, and your hope is more than miraculous, if I may say so! Here have been the most skilful detectives in the country working on this case for weeks without success! No one can get a trace of him. My dear child, a dead sorrow is more endurable than a living anxiety! Make up your mind that young Harcourt is at rest," said the lawyer, solemnly, taking her hand.

"If you mean that he is dead, I do not believe it. I thought so once! In the first dismay and confusion of mind on hearing that he had gone away, and seeing that felon before me claiming all his rights, I thought that Hanson had killed Will and sunk his body in the sea. But as I have grown calmer and stronger, the truth is more and more clearly revealed to my mind,

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that Will is living and is blameless, though he may be temporarily insane and wandering about the country. We shall find him, Mr. Merritt, and all will be well."

"Heaven grant it, my dear! Well, I must say good-evening. But I will look in to-morrow morning and bring you some documents."

"One moment! Will you please cable the news of my release to our friends, the Grays, at Delfcome, Scotland?"

"Yes, the first thing in the morning. Have you heard from them?"

"Only by cable. Of their safe arrival at Liverpool on the thirtieth ultimo. There has been no time for a letter, as this is only the second of December."

"True. Well, good-evening. Sleep well."

"I always do. Good-night." The lawyer left the room.

Roma bowed her head and returned earnest, silent thanks to Heaven for her great deliverance. Then she went into her bedroom and spoke to the invalid.

"Let me wheel your chair into the parlor now. It is a larger and pleasanter room than this, you know."

"Yes, it is," assented Marguerite, as Roma pushed her along.

She made the sick woman quite comfortable, placed a little table by her chair, and set upon it a small pitcher of ice water and a glass, and a little, silver handbell.

"Now, tell me exactly how light you would have the room?"

"Oh, just as it is now, please! I love the light! It does not keep me awake."

"Very well. Now, is there anything else I can do for you?"

"Yes. I am always hungry as well as thirsty in the night. If you could put a pitcher of milk and a plate of wafers there, I should like it, mamma!"

"Very well, my baby, you shall have them," Roma said, and she rang and gave the order, which was promptly filled.

"Now, if you should want me in the night, you must ring that little bell. I shall hear it and get up."

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"Yes."

"And now I shall go in and close the doors for a little while to air the bedroom. When I have opened the windows I will come back to you."

She went into the chamber, drew the sliding doors together, spread a handkerchief over the head of the sleeping child that she might not take cold, and then opened all the windows to the fresh air.

Then she returned to the front room, closing the sliding doors after her, and went around it, drawing curtains, setting back chairs, and in other ways restoring the parlor to order.

While she was deftly and noiselessly doing this, her protégée fell fast asleep.

Roma looked at her, saw that she was comfortable, and then retired to her own room, shut down the windows, and went to bed. This ended the first day of her private hospital experiences.

Her invalid did not disturb her once during the night, but in the morning Roma found that all the milk and wafers had been consumed, and her patient was much better. The weather was finer also. It had ceased raining, and a splendid winter sun was fast drying up the wet ground.

Roma washed and dressed her protegée, as if, indeed, the latter had been her own little child, and then gave her breakfast before she made her morning toilet, or ordered her own and Owlet's morning meal.

After all this she left Owlet to watch by her mother, and went downtown to buy some fresh, pretty flannel wrappers for Marguerite—a white, a pink, a blue one, so that the poor creature might not have to wear the faded and torn silk negligée, the tarnished finery, relics of her opera days.

When these were brought home and displayed to the invalid she showed all the delight of a child in new clothes.

Mr. Merritt called that morning, as he had promised, but brought no news of Will Harcourt. He brought, however, a letter from Miss Margaret Wynthrop. It

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was in answer to a second letter of inquiry which he had written at Roma's request. The letter announced that Mrs. Dorothy Harcourt was no better and no worse; that her mind was impaired, and that she had ceased to ask for her son, being under the impression that he was at college studying hard.

"If I only dared to go to her!" exclaimed Roma; "but she believes me married to Will. She would surely ask me questions which I could not answer; for though she has forgotten much and thinks her son at college as heretofore, yet the sight of me would revive her memory and do immeasurable harm under the circumstances."

"You could not safely go to her, of course," assented the lawyer.

"But there is one thing I can and must do at once; I must, through you, send money to Miss Wynthrop to be used for her benefit. You can manage that so that I shall not appear in it?"

"Oh, yes," replied the attorney, as he arose to take leave.

The wintry days went on; the invalid grew better daily.

Roma each night had let her reclining chair a few inches lower than on the night before, until Marguerite found, to her satisfaction, that she could lie in a recumbent position as on a bed, and rest better and sleep more quietly than formerly. Her physician was surprised at her improvement; but only smiled when Roma hinted at hopes or possibilities of ultimate recovery.

Merritt forwarded a large sum of money—"from a friend who desired to remain unknown"—to Margaret Wynthrop, for the benefit of Dorothy Harcourt, with the request that the dethroned queen might not even be told of the gift; but news of her condition might be occasionally sent to the writer.

No news came of Will Harcourt; yet Roma did not despair. And nothing more, as yet, was heard of Hanson or his yacht. If he had sailed from the Isle of Storms, he had not come to Washington.

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In due time letters came from the Grays at Delfcome, expressing their joy at hearing by cable of Roma's deliverance, announcing the safe arrival of Abbot Elde and Timothy Toomie, and imploring Roma to come over immediately and join them, praising the beauty, majesty and delights of Scotland, rather extravagantly, Roma thought, for though she had never seen Scotland, she had read about the

"Land of the mountain and the flood,"

and knew, whatever its beauty and majesty might be at any season, it was not delightful in the winter.

"But they want to see me, poor dears, and they do not know that I would go to them for the pleasure of seeing them rather than for the finest scenery united to the finest climate in the world, if it were not that I must stay here until I find Will Harcourt."

December drew to a close.

Christmas came. Roma sent in advance her gifts to the servants at Goblin Hall and at the Isle of Storms, and she sent, anonymously, a large box containing a long, fur-lined cloak and muff to match, to Mrs. Dorothy Harcourt, care of Mr. Silas Wynthrop, Sr., Lone Lodge, Logwood, Virginia.

Then she prepared to celebrate Christmas in quite an original way. She first took her old bachelor friend and ex-guardian into her confidence, and through his aid secured the services of a private policeman for the occasion, and from the detective bureau information in regard to the deserving poor of the city, though her special mission on this occasion was to the children of the deserving and the undeserving alike.

"For mortals have no right to make the children of the criminal classes suffer for the sins of their fathers," she said, in a conversation on the subject with her guide, philosopher and friend, Lawyer Merritt.

She next went to a celebrated costumer of Washington and ordered three suits, giving him the meas-

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ures of the proposed wearers—one a Santa Claus, one a Knecht Clobes and one a little Kriss Kringle.

"For a Christmas masque, madame?" inquired the obliging proprietor.

"For something of the sort. They must be at my rooms in the Wesleyan Flats on the morning of Christmas Eve, at latest," she said.

"They shall be, madame."

She then went to a livery stable, and gave a large order for the most capacious sleigh that could be procured, and for six of the smallest ponies. Finally, she sent orders, C. O. D., to New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore, for loads and loads of toys of every description, for flannels and blankets, and for turkeys, geese, chickens, hams, vegetables, and fruits, cakes and candies. And she drew and got cashed checks for several hundred dollars to meet the expense.

Merritt, who was entirely in her confidence, remonstrated at the extravagance.

"Roma Fronde," he said, "it is well you have got no next of kin who would like to get control of your property. My dear, it would be the easiest thing in the world for such a party to prove that you are incapable of taking care of your own money, and perhaps to shut you up in an asylum."

"I am not in the least afraid of being called a lunatic; and, with all deference to your better judgment, I think it would be utterly impossible to make out such a case against me," she answered.

Mr. Merritt shook his head, and continued from time to time to expostulate; but he helped her, notwithstanding, and was her right hand in everything. Without him, with all her money, she could have done but little.

"If we should not have snow, you know, all this entertainment will fall through," he said, three days before Christmas.

"Not at all," she answered. "I will not be prevented. A feed wagon must take the place of the sleigh. It would be an innovation, but no matter."

"The wagon, instead of the sleigh, will not be more

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of an innovation than the whole tomfoolery is," said the lawyer.

"I do not think you are very polite to speak in that way to a lady," gravely remarked Owlet.

"Catherine, behave yourself. Little girls should be seen and not heard," said Madame Marguerite, who now never was wheeled out of the room when the visitor came, and who was so much better that she could walk from chair to sofa and from room to room whenever she wished to do so.

"Let the child have her say," laughed the lawyer.

"Look!" exclaimed Roma, as a thin, white veil seemed to float before the outside of the window. "It is snowing. The clerk of the weather favors our design."

"Yes," said the lawyer, looking out. "It falls fine and thick and straight down. It will be a heavy fall, I think."

It proved to be a very heavy fall. For two days and nights the snow fell continuously, covering the ground six inches deep.

Then in the early hours of Christmas Eve the weather suddenly changed, the sky cleared and it grew intensely cold.

The sun rose on an arctic scene.

But within Roma's steam-warmed apartments all was soft and genial summer heat.

Early in the day her packages began to arrive in express vans.

The first that came were three boxes from the costumers with the masque dresses. Then boxes of toys, clothing and provisions. She was kept busy all day long cashing C. O. D.'s and receiving their value. The goods were piled up in the outer office, where guests' baggage was usually put on their first arrival, and before it was taken to their rooms.

Roma also feared that complaints might be made of the space so occupied, and she sent for the janitress to explain to her that the boxes, hampers, and so forth, would be removed in a few hours, that she was willing to pay for the short storage, and would also like

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to pay for the services of Tom, her waiter, if the janitress would allow her to have the boy's help all to herself from eight o'clock until twelve.

To all of this, even to the receiving of pay for all, Mrs. Brown affably consented, explaining that she would have to send round for 'Polyon Syphax, a neighboring negro man, on whom she could depend, and hire him to take Tom's place for the evening.

These matters, satisfactorily arranged, she returned to her apartments to await the hour of action.

Soon after dark, the great sleigh with its six ponies drew up at a little distance from the house.

About the same time Mr. Merritt arrived, and Tom Gwine, as he called himself, reported for orders.

Roma referred him to Mr. Merritt, who told him to follow downstairs.

There, under the direction of the lawyer, and even with his assistance, Tom opened boxes and hampers, and transferred their contents to the sleigh, with much eye-rolling, and exclaiming at the wonders within.

When the sleigh was well packed, Mr. Merritt and his page returned to Roma's apartments. They found no one but the lady herself in the room.

Madame Marguerite was reclining in her chair in the inner room, and Owlet was with her.

"Now," said Roma, "you may assume your disguises. Put them on over your other clothes. Santa Claus, that big box contains your traveling dress."

"Roma Fronde, no one on the face of the earth, except yourself, could ever prevail on me to make such a consummate jackass of myself as I am doing to-night!"

"Don't be discourteous, my dear friend, or little Owlet will rebuke you," said Roma.

But at this moment Madame Marguerite came into the room, walking feebly, it is true, but straight to the sofa, where she sat down to witness the metamorphosis of an old lawyer into an ancient Santa Claus. It reminded her, she said, of the dear old days of Christmas pantomimes in London theaters.

The lawyer, in pretended disgust, opened his box, and took out a long, white garment that looked like

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the thickest fustian, covered thickly with irregular dots and dabs of cotton-wool to simulate snow; then a pair of heavy boots of the same sort to match. These he drew easily over his own boots. Next, he drew out gloves to match, and laid them aside with the gown. Finally, at the bottom of all was a small box, which, when taken out and opened, revealed a Santa Claus mask in two parts; first, a most venerable and benevolent face, with a long, full, white beard, that might reach to the waist; next, a wig with long, flowing, gray hair; and hair and beard were frosted with simu lated snow, like the rest of the costume. At the bot tom of this smaller box was also a fur cap or hood, something like a monk's cowl, frosted, like all the rest, with seeming snow.

A fine Santa Claus the old lawyer made when he had put on all this masquerading costume over his respectable, black business suit of clothes.

But now it was time to dress Tom. His costume was in the second box. It was in the same form as that of Santa Claus; but it differed from the first in being entirely white, with glass icicles glistening all over it, and hanging from its edges, and hanging on the eyebrows, and from the tip of the nose of the white mask, and from every tress of the yellow hair and beard. Tom, as Knecht Clobes, looked more like a snowman made by boys than anything else.

And now it was Owlet's time to be dressed as Kriss Kringle.

Roma had already put on the child extra underclothing, and also her thickest, warmest winter gown. Her masquerade dress was a robe large enough to go over all her other clothing. It was of white plush, embroidered so thickly all over with crystals and rhinestones, that when she got it on she looked one radiant figure of dazzling prismatic light.

Her mask was in two pieces, front and back, that were to be fitted together on her head, and fastened in a way that shall presently be described. The front was the fair face of a beautiful boy with perfect features; the back was a flow of waving golden hair.

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The two parts covered her whole head and face, leaving only openings at the eyes and lips to see and breathe through, and this without distortion of the beautiful mask. It was bound together and kept fast by a crown of stars made of brilliant rhinestones.

She was, indeed, a splendid, flashing, sparkling vision as she stood, and, to a child's mind, might seem a veritable cherub of light from a higher sphere.

Her mother gazed on her with delight, and then, with maternal satisfaction, said:

"And, under all that radiance, she is as well protected by her warm underclothing as if she were wrapped in furs. It is all well done."

"Come, now," said Roma, "it is past eight, and time to start. Here are your waterproof cloaks. Put them over your costumes and go down to the sleigh. You will find the gifts of every sort arranged, and your policeman on the driver's seat."

And so Roma sent forth her three messengers of love on that Christmas Eve, to carry Christmas into all the poor byways, lanes and alleys and suburbs of the city, to astonish and delight the destitute and desolate, to whom Christmas heretofore had brought but an accession of bitterness by bringing out in stronger relief the contrast between the rich and poor and between the comfortable and the miserable.

Guided by the policeman, all thruogh the poverty-stricken, and even the criminal, districts, the car of Christmas benediction passed; over "Misery Hill" in the northwest, "Coney" in the southwest, "Murder Bay" and "Nigger Hill" in the south, "Swampoodle" in the northeast, everywhere dispensing relief, blessing, delight.

Owlet was in a state of rapture. Never had she had, in the palmiest days of her mother's triumphs, such an ecstatic, such a glorious, such a heavenly Christmas Eve. The negro boy could scarcely keep still in his wonder and delight. He longed to sing and dance to

"Hop, turkey buzzard,
And jump, Jim Crow."

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Even the old lawyer discovered, to his surprise, that there were some other delights in life besides creature comforts and professional successes.

While they were enjoying the finest Christmas festival they had ever had in their lives, Roma stayed in her apartments with her protégée, Madame Marguerite.

"Oh, I hope the child will not get cold," said the nervous invalid, a little doubtfully.

"I will guarantee that she does not," replied Roma, quite confidently.

"She would have broken her heart if we had not let her go," added Madame Marguerite, in a sort of self-excuse.

"It would have been wrong to refuse her. As a rule, children of her age should be in bed at this hour; but this is an exceptional day, and an exceptional occasion," said Roma. "And now I am going to make some eggnogg after my father's invaluable recipe, and you and I will keep Christmas Eve together."

What happened on Christmas morning will be told in the second of this series, under the title of "Dorothy Harcourt's Secret," published in cloth binding uniform with this volume.

THE END.

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If there was nothing more about the work to attract especial attention, the account of the meeting of the kings on the historic "field of the cloth of gold" would entitle the story to the most favorable consideration of every reader.

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The one book of this gifted author which is best remembered, and which will be read with pleasure for many years to come, is "Captain Brand," who, as the author states on his title page, was a "pirate of eminence in the West Indies." As a sea story pure and simple, "Captain Brand" has never been excelled, and as a story of piratical life, told without the usual embellishments of blood and thunder, it has no equal.

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Details of the establishment and destruction of the Moravian "Village of Peace" are given at some length, and with minute description. The efforts to Christianize the Indians are described as they never have been before, and the author has depicted the characters of the leaders of the several Indian tribes with great care, which of itself will be of interest to the student.

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